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"Mister 44."

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"MISTER 44"

CHAPTER I

SADIE CHRISTENS THE SHRIMP

"BRACE up, kid," said Sadie. "It'll be six o'clock before you know it."

She mopped the cold, moist forehead of No. 12 with a four-cent cotton handkerchief and spoke softly, as a mother might.

No. 12 leaned indifferently against the window-frame. The air came in reluctantly and sluggishly and was hot, but it was fresher than the air in the packing-room. A thin, pale face lifted itself to Sadie's and a pair of tired eyes returned thanks for the ministrations.

"I'd 'a' been all right if he hadn't picked on me," said No. 12. "He's always pickin'. Ain't it hot?"

"Some hot," assented Sadie. "But don't you care, kid. As for him"— she nodded toward the center of the room —"what do you care if he does pick? 'Tisn't like havin' a man pick on you. He's a shrimp."

"Wish I was like you," murmured No. 12 wist-

fully. "But when he starts at me I get all fluttered. Gee, I wish it was six!"

The packing and delivery department of the Challenge Shirt Company was filled with a smothering sultriness. The odor of newly made garments seemed to stifle the air's feeble life.

Thirty girls worked listlessly, eyes on the clock. They were slowing down, like tired runners near the end of a long journey. Flannel shirts did not disappear into pasteboard boxes so rapidly as an hour before. Neither did boys who carried away the boxes move with forenoon alacrity. The symptoms of a day nearly spent were unmistakable.

"You, No. 18!"

The voice was petulant and shrill. It came from a collarless man who wiped his face as he talked. He was little and young, with a beaklike nose, a pallid skin, and faded eyes that watered unpleasantly. Exasperation and futility struggled within his narrow breast. Sadie turned slowly and surveyed him with calm eyes. Eighteen was her number.

"Get to work, No. 18," croaked the little man. He tried to be menacing, but the pose signified no menace to Sadie.

"I was tryin' to do something for No. 12," she said in an even voice. "The poor kid's about in."

"You get them olive-drabs into them boxes," retorted the little man. "No need for you to loaf because No. 12 is loafin'."

"You win," observed Sadie placidly.

She went to her place at the long table and began putting shirts into boxes with skilled but deliberate

hands. The little man glared. It was a full minute before Sadie spoke again, and then it was like an addition to her last words.

"No. 12'd be doing this, too, if you'd leave her alone. The heat didn't get her; it was the pickin'."

The little man, who had turned to rasp at a laggard boy, whirled about.

"Who's boss here?" he demanded.

"Too hard for me," commented Sadie as she slid the cover on a box and lifted her eyes for a few seconds to contemplate the questioner.

"*I'm* boss."

"You certainly are a grand question-and-answer department, Mr. Ferguson."

There was faint emphasis on the mister. It was not lost upon the packing department. Momentarily hands that were packing away shirts paused. Two girls whispered. When Sadie and the superintendent battled the output of the Challenge Shirt Company marked time in its march to the consumer.

"You know the rules — work and no back talk," snapped Ferguson. "You lookin' for a fine?"

Sadie made no answer, but inspected an olive-drab critically.

"I say you want to be fined?"

"Leap to it," advised Sadie.

"Twenty-five cents," said Ferguson as he turned for a tour of table-inspection.

Idle hands were galvanized into motion.

Sadie smiled tolerantly. It was not in her nature to cry when she was hurt. Gayly she put olive-drabs into boxes. But she was hurt.

There never was a time when a twenty-five-cent fine failed to hurt a seven-dollar-a-week envelope. A ten-cent fine was a severe loss; a quarter fine achieved the dignity of financial embarrassment. It amounted almost to involuntary bankruptcy when you were putting fifty cents a week into a savings-bank and twenty cents into a sick-benefit fund.

Just why Sadie subscribed to the sick benefit she did not clearly know. She was never sick; but other girls were sick, often, and it seemed like a good idea, for the twenty cents helped somebody, if not Sadie.

Six o'clock was near. Sluggard hands, whose owners suddenly feared Sadie's fate, worked with imitation energy. Sadie, however, kept her even pace; she never hurried, yet she could put more shirts into more boxes in a nine-hour day than any of her sister workers.

Her manner gave no trace of the little tragedy that was bringing her day to a close. She hummed softly. Twenty-five cents meant staying away from the movies five nights. It was a blow, but she would manage to survive it.

She did not notice that Ferguson had paused again at her table until he leaned across it and said tentatively:

"Say, Sadie."

"No. 18," she corrected.

"Now, listen, Sadie."

"Line's busy."

"Quit kiddin'," he said with an uneasy laugh. "You and me don't want to be bad friends."

"Who said so? Why not?"

Sadie's eyes widened in affected surprise as she bestowed a measuring glance across the table.

Ferguson leaned his elbows on a pile of shirts and looked up at her.

"Listen, now," he protested. "I ain't mad, Sadie. But you had no call to talk back. It's against rules. I gotta have discipline, y' know."

"Then why don't you get it?" asked Sadie smoothly.

Ferguson winced, frowned, and began again.

"I just had to fine you after what was said. Didn't I?"

"Sure; for the public good," nodded Sadie.

"Lemme tell you something, Sadie. I can forget to send a fine-slip to the desk."

"I bet you can," assented Sadie cordially.

"And I —"

"Only don't."

"And now, Sadie, tie a can on that stuff. I was goin' to say —"

"If you forget to turn in the fine, I won't, Mr. Ferguson."

Now she paused in her task of stacking up shirts, lifted one from a pile, shook it out, and tossed it aside.

"Thirty-eight label on a thirty-six," she observed.

Ferguson examined the garment critically.

"Guess you're right," he commented admiringly. "You're a wonder on catchin' wrong sizes, Sadie."

"Uh-huh," said Sadie as her eyes rested appraisingly on the person of the superintendent. The glance conveyed no meaning to Ferguson.

"About that fine," he resumed. "Wanta know how not to pay it?"

"No. Can't upset my bookkeepin' now; I got it all set down."

"Y' know that picnic, Sadie?" Ferguson's voice was wheedling.

"Sure. I read the poster."

"You hadn't ought to have turned me down like you done. But it ain't too late yet."

"Still a chance to get in under the wire?" queried Sadie.

"You bet there is! And no fine-slip, neither — if you go."

"Sounds easy," she commented. "Say the word and save a quarter — just like that!" And she snapped her fingers.

Ferguson nodded.

"No, Mr. Ferguson," she said slowly, shaking her head. "It wouldn't be fair to the quarter to play that kind of a dirty trick on it."

Ferguson gulped and hesitated, then returned to the attack.

"Listen, now, Sadie; just listen! Will you?"

"I did listen — plenty. I got an earful. Now you listen: The company saves a quarter on Sadie this week. It can't lose that quarter if it tries. If it's in my envelope Saturday night I'll call a special meetin' of the board of directors, hand it over, and notify the stockholders there's a new dividend comin'. That quarter's got a life sentence, Mr. Ferguson."

The superintendent met Sadie's steady gaze and

held his ground, for the way for retreat with honor was not yet open. He was gurgling a sentence in his throat when Sadie asked suddenly:

"You're a thirty-four. Yes?"

"I don't get you. You mean —"

"Chest."

Ferguson shifted his weight to the other foot.

"I wear thirty-sixes. I *can* wear a thirty-four, but —"

"You're wearin' a thirty-four now, and it's flappin'," she interrupted. "You mean you *can* wear a thirty-two. Don't kid Sadie. I got an eye for sizes; you told me so yourself."

The superintendent straightened his body stiffly.

"Fourteen collar?" queried Sadie sweetly.

Ferguson began to stutter.

"And a six-and-a-quarter hat," she added, nodding. "Correct me, Mr. Ferguson, if I get you wrong."

She spoke placidly, even solicitously, but there was a telltale glint of hardness in her gray eyes. A hush had fallen upon the packing department, broken only by the sound of Sadie's voice.

"I've got nothin' against that picnic, but I've got a lot against you, Ferguson." Sadie had dropped the accented mister.

"I wouldn't insult a movie by walkin' in with you. You've picked on me because I won't go. Not bein' a man, I expect that's your privilege. You've been lookin' for a chance to fine me; watchin' for me to break a rule. The whole room knows it.

"Well, you got your chance. Shake hands with

yourself. You're gettin' another chance right now, too. It's worth half a dollar to speak a piece to you. I'm speakin' it.

"You want my reason for not goin'? This is it, Ferguson: You ain't fit to be seen with me. Maybe that sounds proud. All right; I am proud."

Sadie paused for an instant. The superintendent stood in awed fascination.

"Even if you were decent, Ferguson," she went on without a trace of excitement, "you're not big enough to take me anywhere. That's reason enough to stand by itself. You're a thirty-four — scant. I'll allow that, but it's charity.

"Anything over a thirty-two shirt on you is throwin' away goods and boostin' the high cost of livin'. You're undersized, mind and body; you ain't healthy to look at. You're drivin' me to smoked spectacles.

"You're just naturally mean and little. Now, you keep away from me except when you got orders to give. Next time you speak to me I'm No. 18. I don't want to spank you, but if I get any more 'Sadie' from you I might have to.

"You can put another quarter on that fine now, and maybe they'll make you president of the company for reducin' operatin' expenses."

Sadie hesitated; then leaned forward across the table and said with terrible distinctness:

"Do you know what kind of an insect you are, Ferguson? You're a shrimp!"

Ferguson, like a man dazed, backed slowly away from the table, fell over a stool, sprawled for an instant on the floor, and then made a dash for the cut-

ting-room. The packing department, uncertain whether to laugh, cheer, or utter cries of astonishment and dismay, did none of those things, but resumed the business of putting shirts into boxes.

Sadie liked that word "shrimp." She never saw one, being an inland girl, but she knew instinctively that a shrimp was little and very much like Ferguson. Anyhow, Sadie was sure it was some sort of an insect.

She had borrowed it from the vocabulary of a ranchman, a person in whom she had taken immediate and tremendous interest. He had come one day to order a gross of olive-drabs for the ranch-hands out in Montana. Sadie had been called in to sort sizes.

Olive-drabs from that day had had a peculiar fascination for her. Cowboys wore them, she learned; so did miners and prospectors, and even "swells" who hunted and fished just for fun. Olive-drabs spelled adventure for Sadie — and outdoors. That, after all, was the main thing — outdoors.

"What sizes?" Sadie had asked the rancher.

"Forties up to forty-sixes."

Sadie's eyes had begun to glow.

"Cowboys must be easy to look at," she commented. "Want a few thirty-sixes?"

"No shrimps in my country, sister," said the rancher. "Do I look like one?"

"No-o," admitted Sadie. "You're kinda strainin' the buttons on that forty-two you're wearin'."

She treasured shrimp. Every time she looked

at Ferguson the word popped into her mind. To Sadie it was more than merely descriptive of her boss. It became a unit of size. She standardized men according to it.

A shrimp was the smallest possible — a sort of No. 1, Triple A. Then came the peewees, and after the peewees the sparrows. None of them got to be men until they attained Sadie's minimum, forty-inch chests and sixteen collars.

They might go as far beyond that as nature willed and still please Sadie. She had no maximum.

Ferguson was still in the cutting-room when the hands of the packing department clock touched six. A gong rang, and thirty girls, in various stages of languor, turned toward the locker-room. Sadie walked over to No. 12 and patted her shoulder.

"Feelin' better, kid?" she asked.

No. 12 nodded; then said in an awed whisper:

"They all heard you say it. They're passin' it round now among the drivers. What's a shrimp, Sade?"

"A thirty-four, deary."

Smiling, Sadie went to the locker-room. She was in a hurry to get outdoors. She wanted to breathe. Something seemed to fetter her lungs, even in the big room. She wanted space and sky and open places — as much of the big outdoors as she could find in Buffalo.

Bigness and outdoors occupied the same pigeonhole in Sadie's mind. She worshiped both. Big people were *her* people; outdoors was *her* place, even if only a dream place.

Big men were outdoor men; if they chanced to be elsewhere, they were misplaced. True, mere bigness was not all that Sadie worshiped; but it was a fundamental, a foundation on which she reared her ideals.

Because she came from an Ohio farm to a city factory she had not renounced her gospel. The farm was out under the sky; but it was a little farm, set close to a little village. Better than the city, perhaps, as Sadie might have admitted; but there are livings to be earned in this world, and hers was one of them.

The farm was outdoors at its smallest — a sort of shrimp outdoors. The city was big, she acknowledged. But it was the wrong kind of bigness — a shut-in bigness. It was man-made. Sadie wanted the kind that was God-made.

Sadie was big herself. Five feet eight she stood, bare-footed and with her hair down. There was a mark on the door in her hall bedroom to attest it, put there by No. 12, who had to stand on a chair to do it.

Sadie was glad she was big. It was even better than being handsome, and she was both. Any time you saw Sadie she was worth contemplating. Just for a moment, then, contemplate her somewhat in detail:

Five feet eight, as specified. Straight and supple, like a sapling, but not so slender. Sadie was rounded and full-bosomed. She was a forty herself. The penny scales said that she weighed one hundred and fifty-four pounds, and they spoke wisdom. If

you asked her her age, she said she was twenty-four, and she spoke the truth.

Why she had a head of classic shape must remain a mystery. You couldn't prove eugenics by Sadie. There was nothing classic about the heads of the folk back in Ohio, nor did they share Sadie's bigness. She topped her father by two inches, while her mother was only shoulder high.

Somewhere in the long ago there may have been ancestors with classic heads and stalwart bodies; if so, she never heard of them. She remembered only her grandfather, whose head was level and honest, but not classic.

Sadie's brow was broad and serene. Her eyes were gray, and they also were serene, for serenity and Sadie were interchangeable terms. Through those calm and steady eyes she looked upon the world curiously, frankly, and unafraid, like a child.

She had a nose as large as a 154-pound girl ought to have, beautifully straight in the bridge and delicate in the nostrils. It ran generations back of the Ohio farm.

Her mouth was ample in size, firm, good-natured, and humorous. But it could be serious, too. And whatever else it was, it never failed to be sincere.

Her lips were full and red. Sadie could curl the lower one in fine scorn, although there was no harm in her. Her chin showed more than good modeling; it revealed courage and independence.

Newly cast bronze possesses the only color corresponding to Sadie's hair. The quantity of that hair fairly appalled her, for she had to do it up herself,

seven dollars a week leaving nothing for the wages of a maid. It fell below her waist when she unloosed it; ravishing to look at, the very dickens to comb.

Sculptors made statues of Juno because they never met Sadie. She was not Juno's little sister; she was her twin. Nobody ever called her pretty; it would have been ridiculous. She was merely handsome.

And healthy! Sadie bloomed perennially, like a gorgeous flower, all in whites and pinks and creams. Even the factory could not stop her from blooming.

The influence of environment may be demonstrated by scientists in a million ways, but not by Sadie. Like eugenics, it was a doctrine that fell by the wayside when you looked at her — which you usually did. The factory might put its mark on the Shrimp and on No. 12, but not on Juno's sister.

If you have paid attention to what Sadie said to the Shrimp — and *how* she said it — you suspect something. Much book learning was not hers. In fact, very little of it had chanced her way. Her mind was all right; it was quick, alert, and astonishingly retentive — a very sane and normal mind. It was rather philosophic, too; and it had a clean, direct way of getting to the point of things. It played no tricks on Sadie; it gave no illusions. Above all, being her mind, it could not be else than serene.

She knew that book-learning was a strange land, only to be viewed by her from the edges, for she had neither time nor resources to explore it. She had regrets, of course; but she gave no time to sorrow or brooding.

She accepted her limitations, but always with a reservation — "some day!" There was honest raw material in that mind of Sadie's; if it had not been used, at least it was unspoiled.

The row with the Shrimp had not disturbed her. She had almost forgotten it as she walked out of the factory. Probably she would have dismissed it for the evening if a clerk at the office window had not handed her a slip as she passed. The slip read:

No. 18, Packing Dept. 50c. fine for violation of rule 8. Reported by Ferguson, supt.

"Well, I had him right," said Sadie as she crumpled the paper.

No. 12 sidled up to her on the street and whispered indignantly:

"Listen, Sade! No. 22 says she's seen shrimps and they ain't insects, like you said."

"I should be anxious, honey," said Sadie.

CHAPTER II

SADIE'S FRIDAY JINX

EVEN a girl without a beau cannot sit in a seven-by-ten room on an early September evening, no matter if she did squander half a dollar in telling a man he was a shrimp. So, after she had eaten her dinner, Sadie Hicks wandered out into the street.

That Sadie had no beau was beyond the understanding of the girls in the packing department, although it was clear as crystal to her. Of course, it took a big man to "go with" Sadie. But there were big men in the factory. Sadie eliminated them easily; the outdoor test settled them.

With the teamsters it took a little more than the outdoor test, yet they went with the others. They were not for her. She was not conscious of holding herself superior to them; she simply did not need them in her scheme of things. And when Sadie did not need anybody, that person who did not soon sense the fact was a dullard indeed.

When she walked of an evening, however, she was not alone. She had an invisible escort. His name she did not even know. He was merely her ideal. He was constantly by her side, walking on the street,

sitting at the movies, standing at soda-fountains, riding on trolley-cars.

Sadie took a lot of comfort out of him. For one thing, she did not have to share him with anybody. He was all hers. None of the other girls could even so much as look at him. She held him *incommunicado* in the prison of her imagination.

He was a creature of many personalities, but these were merely his outer cloaks. Underneath he was always the same.

That was one charm of having an ideal for a companion. Sadie could dress him as she pleased and make him what she willed, but she always knew that, in any guise, he was his same sturdy self.

He was big, of course. He was brave and he was kind. Sometimes he was handsome, sometimes ugly — but always rugged.

Whether he was rich or poor she did not know nor care. She never pried into his purse. He and Sadie were tremendous friends.

So they walked the crowded pavement together, the factory, the boxes of shirts and the Shrimp forgotten. They paused to study a lithograph in front of a movie palace:

THE WISTFUL HEART
A Drama of the City in Three Reels

Sadie and her ideal moved on — quickly. On the next block they paused again, where the poster said:

A FLIGHT TO FREEDOM
HOW THE BANKER'S DAUGHTER WON THE MAN OF HER HEART
Two Parts

Sadie shrugged her broad shoulders and led the way again.

Presently there was a long pause; another poster caught Sadie's eye from the opposite side of the street. There were men and horses, lariats and six-shooters.

THE MENACE OF MONTANA
THE THIRD ADVENTURE OF
DICK ELLISON
IN TWO THRILLING REELS,
WITH A COMPANY OF
SIXTY PEOPLE
First Time in City

"Montana!" whispered Sadie.

She knew "Dick Ellison." She had a vivid memory of the first time he ever galloped across a screen. The second adventure, too, was stored away in her mind. She had followed him through cañons, across swollen rivers, up the mountainsides, wherever there were thrills and perils and tasks for big men to do.

Was she to miss the third adventure? Sadie opined not.

It was not until she laid her nickel at the threshold of the little doorway in the pane of glass that Sadie remembered something else — Rule No. 8 and the fifty-cent fine. She hesitated, for she had resolved —

The nickel disappeared and a red ticket popped out through the opening. Sadie sighed, but not sadly. She took the ticket.

"It wasn't exactly my fault," she murmured as she passed inside. "That girl is awful quick at grabbin' nickels."

You have doubtless seen the third adventure of Dick Ellison and have a tingling memory of the stage-coach that lurched so close to the edge of the precipice; therefore, it is unnecessary to tell what Sadie saw. Her ideal took his seat beside her, of course. That it was occupied by the corporeal person of a gum-chewing girl was no difficulty at all; the girl did not even know that Sadie's ideal was there.

In the middle of the first reel a curious thing happened. Sadie's ideal left her side and became suddenly visible upon the screen. No, he did not become Dick Ellison. He was still a person without a name. But Sadie knew him in an instant, for all that, and she smiled softly.

It was not a new experience for her; he had done the same thing often, and always without warning or explanation. She knew he would come back to her when the machine ceased to click, for the movie people were merely borrowing him for a little.

To-night his hairy chaps proclaimed him a cowboy. He rode like the wind and shot like a rapid-fire automatic.

"A good forty-two," murmured Sadie as she watched him.

Faithful always, he was by her side as she walked out.

"You did fine to-night," she whispered to him.

You may think he was on the screen again when Dick Ellison's third adventure once more began to unwind. But he was not. He had left with Sadie. If you stayed to see the show a second time you saw the same figure, it is true; and he did the same things, without a hair's breadth variation.

But the soul had gone out of him, and that was something you could not see. Only Sadie could, for he was *her* ideal and not yours.

Back in the seven-by-ten room Sadie sat on the edge of her bed, braiding burnished bronze into thick strands. Even after the braids were finished she sat there, thinking. Although she seemed to be in Buffalo, she was really in Montana. She had been there ever since the middle of the first reel.

Her process of thought involved many little wrinklings of her forehead, occasional frowns, much pursing of the lips, and now and then a short, half-embarrassed laugh. At least twice she blushed.

"I guess it's all right," she said aloud, rising suddenly and going over to her little table. "It's not like flirting. It's just saying hello. He won't mind."

Sadie opened a box of note-paper, spread a sheet on the back of a magazine, and began to write. She wrote slowly and with many pauses.

After a while she laid down her pen and examined her work critically. First she read it in silence; then again, voicing the words softly, to get an idea of how it sounded. Then, with a vivid flush in her cheeks, she tore the paper into small pieces.

Another sheet of paper came out of the box and there was more writing, with much laborious penmanship and continuous struggle with the spelling of words. Pauses, burdened with little scowls and smiles, indicated where commas ought to be, but were not.

Writing a letter was not so simple to Sadie as putting shirts into boxes, while writing *this* kind of a letter was a problem of particular intricacy, to be solved without the aids of precedent or experience.

"Sounds kinda foolish," commented Sadie as she reread it. She tore it up.

Ultimately, after fingering a third sheet of paper, she returned it to the box and shook her head slowly.

"'Tisn't that it's not proper," she mused; "although, of course, it's not regular. But if it's done at all, it's got to be done right, and the way I do it doesn't listen good. Maybe he wouldn't understand, and I wouldn't want him to get a wrong idea.

"Gee, but I could use an education for about three minutes!"

Sadie took off her shoes and stockings, blew out the lamp, groped her way to the bed like a statuesque ghost, and lay down. The room was warm, and the

little window, opened to its widest, was a poor substitute for a ventilator. But it was not the lack of air that kept Sadie awake. It was a puzzled brain.

Fifteen minutes later she arose briskly, located the matches, and relighted the lamp. She was smiling now, and there was a confident look in her eyes.

The third sheet of paper emerged from the box and the pen began to write. Her fingers moved steadily but cautiously; her expression was one of calm satisfaction. All the hesitation, the frowns, and the other signals of perplexity had vanished.

She blotted her letter carefully, held it at arm's length, and read it. A proud little toss of her head and a faint chuckle announced the verdict.

Out went the light again and into bed went Sadie. The letter was under her pillow. She was asleep in five minutes.

Morning in the packing-room of the Challenge Shirt Company found Sadie in a state outwardly of placidity, but inwardly of turmoil. Occasionally she raised a hand to her breast with affected carelessness to feel if "it" was still safe. The soft crackle of paper under the touch of her fingers reassured her each time.

Ordinarily Sadie paid no attenton to the destination labels on the pasteboard boxes. All she was required to do was to put into each box what its slip called for. But now she examined labels diligently, though furtively. The task she had set herself was fraught with such an element of chance that she began to think by the time the noon gong rang that it

might be weeks, months, perhaps years, before she accomplished it.

First, it must be an olive-drab. Second, it must be going to Montana. Third, it must be a forty-four.

That constituted no impossible combination, of course. But when thirty girls besides Sadie were packing shirts it added thirty to one against her, in addition to the initial odds. She could not appeal for assistance, even to No. 12. The girls would ask questions and Sadie had no information for them.

The day went slowly. Sadie realized for the first time what an amazing number of combinations it is possible to make out of shirts and sizes and States. She had one Montana box, but they were blues. She packed an unusual number of forty-fours, but they were gray and none of them went to Montana. She handled olive-drabs by the gross, including everything up to forty-eights, but they went South and East. At other tables she could see olive-drabs disappear into boxes, and once she thought she glimpsed a Montana label, but could not be certain. Even so, it was of no benefit to her.

Ferguson let her alone all forenoon. Even had he tried to annoy her Sadie would not have noticed him, for she was too intent on trying to coax her luck. The paper hidden in her waist now and then crackled a reminder, although she did not need one. Sometimes it scratched uncomfortably, but Sadie bore it as a necessary hardship of adventure. For that was what she knew it to be — an adventure.

Another hour came and went in the packing-room;

it was a blistering one, too. Sadie's note became damp and crumpled. Worse, it was still hiding against her ample breast, like a timid and guilty thing, looking vainly for an avenue of escape.

She was almost downhearted. She had no idea why the Fates should mock her. Why, only the day before — the very afternoon that cost her fifty cents — she had packed olive-drabs for Montana; and she was almost positive they were big sizes, too.

She wondered if Montana had all the olive-drabs it would ever need. Didn't it ever wear out its shirts?

The afternoon was unlucky, too, because the Shrimp was showing symptoms of a conciliatory spirit. She would neither conciliate, arbitrate, nor mediate. He finally absorbed this fact, after Sadie had stated it slowly and distinctly three times. When it reached him at last he gaped at her and walked away.

Sadie watched him go, turned to No. 12, nodded in the direction of the retreating Shrimp, tapped her forehead, and said gravely:

"Nobody home."

Then came the last hour, and with half of it gone Sadie was as nearly unhappy as it was possible for her to be. She had not even seen a Montana label. It seemed that Montana had quit wearing shirts, even blues and grays.

She fell to consulting her mental geography, which was not extensive, and considered the matter of a substitute, not for olive-drabs, but for Montana. There were other States that had cowboys, others

that had plenty of outdoors and forty-four-inch chests. If luck was going to run against her in this fashion it might be wisdom to propitiate the goddess by a compromise.

Idaho and Wyoming suggested themselves immediately, but there were no labels to match them. There was a Colorado box, but she was not sure about cowboys in Colorado; she could remember only miners. Then there was Utah, but she was not certain that Mormons punched cows or wore chaps.

It took a label to jog Sadie's memory further. Arizona! Her pulse quickened in an instant. Arizona meant cowboys, in all probability fully as large as those in Montana.

"What's the matter with Arizona?" she asked herself. And answered, "Not a single little thing."

With a hand that was nervous for Sadie, but normal for any other girl in the department, she lifted the order slip from the box.

Olive-drabs! That was point two. Sadie closed her eyes for an instant before she read further. She was not praying; just rooting. Then, with lips compressed, she went over the sizes.

Thirty-eights — forties — forty-twos!

And forty-fours!

The first thing she did was to blush hotly; the second, to rush for a pile of olive-drab shirts.

"Good land, Sadie!" exclaimed No. 6, who chanced to be in her path. "I'd as soon have a trolley bump me! Ain't you hot enough without runnin'?"

Sadie had no time to answer. She hurried back

to her table with an armful of shirts. Into the Arizona box went the thirty-eights, the forties, and the forty-twos. Now her hand lay upon the forty-fours and lingered caressingly. She hesitated. After all, ought she? Suppose —

"Now or never!" said a voice within her.

She bent over the table, trying to conceal the hands that fumbled at the bosom of her shirt-waist. She wondered if anybody was watching her. She knew that her face was fiery.

Skillfully she palmed a slip of paper as a hand came forth with it. A second later the slip disappeared into the left-hand breast-pocket of the topmost shirt. Then from somewhere came a pin that fixed the paper firmly, so that no energetic salesman out in Arizona would shake it from its hiding-place.

A second time Sadie examined the size-tag on the shirt; then critically surveyed the garment itself. It was a forty-four beyond peradventure, truly labeled. An instant more saw it resting in the Arizona box, with three other forty-fours on top of it.

Sadie slipped on the cover and drew a deep breath.

"I don't care if it is a Friday," she murmured. "And Arizona looks good to me!"

The Shrimp came running out of the office with a memorandum in his hand. He darted elflike from table to table, calling in sharp tones:

"Large size olive-drabs and blues, forty up! Rush order! Gimme whatever you got."

Sadie's cheeks paled. She knew what a rush order meant. It was remorseless. Swiftly she

looked about for the boy who carried away the filled boxes. If she could only get it out to the shipping-room it might still be safe.

The Shrimp was approaching swiftly, breaking up orders right and left. He reached Sadie.

"Got any big drabs and blues?" he barked.

"Here's some drabs," she said, pushing a pile toward him.

"I need a lot. What's in there?"

He nodded to the Arizona box.

"Grays," said Sadie smoothly.

The Shrimp ripped the cover off the box with a quick movement.

"Grays nothin'!" he exclaimed angrily. "What's the matter with you?"

He grabbed the box and rushed away with it.

Sadie looked after him dully. Good-by, Arizona! Good-by, cowboy! She knew not where the rush order was going, but she felt in her heart that it was not destined for the big outdoors. And this after a solid day of patient waiting!

For a full minute she stood motionless, wondering why it had to be the Shrimp who delivered the crushing blow to hope. Then she sighed softly, reached for another box, and began stacking up shirts. This time she did not look at the destination label.

"Oh, well," muttered Sadie, "I suppose there is somethin' in the Friday business. And it might be worse. The Shrimp can steal Arizona from me, but he can't steal a forty-four-inch chest off a man."

CHAPTER III

THE CITY-HATERS

THE man in the bow-seat lifted his paddle from its resting-place across the gunwale of the canoe, sighed wearily, made half a dozen perfunctory strokes, and then trailed the blade in the water. He turned stiffly and cautiously, every movement betraying his unfamiliarity with travel in such fashion.

"See here! Don't you ever get tired?" he demanded, his voice fretful.

The man in the stern grinned, but did not stop paddling. His teeth gripped a brier pipe, from which a delicate wisp of blue-gray smoke trailed out behind, as much a part of the canoe's wake as the plainly marked track that ran back a quarter of a mile across the smooth water of the Northeast Arm.

"I said not to peg yourself out at the start," he answered. "Take it easy. You'll be up to it in a week or so. I don't mind going it alone."

"My legs are cramped," complained the occupant of the bow-seat. "I can't stretch them because you would put that blanket-roll in the bow."

"Sorry," observed the paddler; but he grinned again. "Had to have some weight in the bow in order to get a good trim."

The person to whom this explanation of his nar-

row quarters was made did not sense the full significance of it, for his mind was too intent on his physical discomforts, not the least of which was a neck already proclaiming by its hue that the September sun was hot and was enjoying a cloudless afternoon. The bow-man did not stop to reflect that he weighed but a hundred and forty pounds, while about a dozen feet behind him crouched a genial human engine that scaled two hundred when in condition — which was always.

The engine was sitting back on its heels, braced as securely as if bolted to bedplates; the upper part of it swayed noiselessly back and forth, with a barely perceptible side-roll, while the paddle cut cleanly and silently into the water with the regularity of a pendulum swinging twenty-eight arcs to the minute. It had all the marks of a well-adjusted piece of machinery, running on a middle load.

The bow-man lighted a cigarette and smoked for a few minutes without speaking. His eyes dwelt upon the rankly wooded shore that paralleled the course of the canoe, a hundred yards to starboard. To him there was a sameness in it that bored. For nearly two hours he had been surveying that shore-line, and each mile of it had seemed exactly like the last — just thousands of trees, crowding each other for the honor of standing in the front row at the water's edge.

To the paddling man, however, this shore-line was a much-diversified landscape. He viewed it with the familiarity of trained eyes.

He saw coves and little bays, dead forest mon-

archs that had fallen face forward into the glistening water; rocks that were guides and landmarks; sharply jutting capes that served as bearings for the navigator; gullies in the hillsides through which cold streams trickled into the lake; here and there a reddening maple or a yellowing birch; the entrances to two old portages and to one that had been cut out only the season before — and these were but a few of the things he saw. Each had a significance and an interest. He noted them with a quiet and attentive eye as he drove the well-laden canoe upon its steady course.

"How much further, Stod?" asked the bow-man as he made a rueful examination of a blistered palm.

"About twenty minutes more; around the second point. There's a good island there. We won't begin to work full days until next week."

"Full days!" echoed the voice from the forward seat. "Don't you call this a full one?"

"We'll only be ten miles from the station when we hit camp. That's not half a day's work."

The bow-man groaned.

"I don't see where all the joy comes in," he said. "I think you played a trick on me, Stod."

The big man laughed outright and halted his paddle for the first time in more than an hour.

"You'll get the point of view by and by," he answered. "After a few days your mind will unlimber, along with your muscles. Just because the Northeast Arm isn't Broadway and because that point over there isn't decorated with an electric sign, you feel like a lost soul.

"As a matter of fact, Larry, I don't think you've really had a soul for several years. It ran away from you. I expect you'll find it up here. This is where souls that get tired of Broadway go."

"I only came here for my health," said the bowman defensively. "The doctor said I needed a change and a rest. Well, I've got the change; but if you call this rest you've got a queer way of giving wrong names to things."

"That's because you have the idea that resting is doing nothing, son. You've been resting for several years and you're all played out."

"Oh, that's the way all you husky folks talk. But I'm not built to go out and conquer a wilderness. A man's got to have beef for that sort of thing."

"Beef? Oh, I don't know, Larry! Before we go home I'll show you an Indian up here who took a hundred-and-twenty-pound pack over an uphill portage without setting it down until he reached the far end.

"Length of portage, one and a half miles. Weight of Indian, same as pack. Witnesses, myself and the Indian's dog. Explanation: the Indian never saw Broadway."

The big man leaned against his paddle again, and the canoe, which had been losing way during the conversation, began to pick up speed.

True to the promise made to him, Larry's eyes viewed an island as the canoe rounded the second point. It lay but a hundred yards ahead. A minute after he sighted it the canoe came to a gentle rest, broadside to a sloping rock, and was held steady

by the big man while Larry stepped out after a sharp caution to keep his foot off the gunwale.

He walked back and forth, stamping his feet painfully and straightening his back with grunts of discomfort.

"I don't see why we had to come this far to find an island," he observed as he glanced up toward the trees. "Seems to me we've passed a hundred."

"Sixty-eight," corrected the big man, who seemed in no hurry to get out of the canoe, but was engaged in refilling his pipe. "But this is the one we wanted."

"I don't see any difference in them."

"Why, man, they're as different as can be! Different shapes, different sizes, and different dispositions. Didn't know an island could have a disposition? Well, you'll learn! That's what makes them interesting. Some give you the glad hand; some are sulky, while there are some that will bite if you don't watch sharp."

"Then I'm bitten, all right," remarked Larry gloomily as he tenderly felt the back of his neck.

When Stoddard finally uncoiled his long legs and stepped ashore the complaining one momentarily forgot his troubles in contemplating the marvel that such a huge creature could fit himself into the narrow, wedge-shaped stern of a Peterborough. Before they had embarked at the station Larry Livingston had doubted that the thing was possible; now that Stoddard was ashore again, he was still uncertain that the feat had been accomplished, and had a vague idea there was some trick in it.

Stoddard was big, beyond denial. There were six feet two of him, net. Set him apart from other men and he did not look the height, for he carried width and bulk with it to an extent that made his altitude no freak dimension.

As men of his size go, he was not heavy; he merely possessed the beef and muscle that by right belonged to him. Nor was he any slower in movement than a well-conditioned young man of medium size. His body moved easily and quickly, with a sense of certainty in every effort it put forth however trivial. He was not leaden-footed, even in his hob-nailed boots.

He broke into a laugh as he made a critical inspection of the figure of Larry Livingston. It stood as a synonym for dejection. Face, neck, and hands were scarlet from the sun and the glitter of the water, while the woful brown eyes that gazed upon Stoddard reproachfully were smarting furiously as the salty sweat trickled into them.

"Oh, it's all right for you!" growled Livingston. "You're used to it. You don't know the difference between a jungle and the lounge-room of a club. Sid Osborne said you were half a savage, and I believe you are. But I'm still civilized, and I'll be hanged if I'm much taken with what you've brought me into!"

"You haven't had time yet, son."

Stoddard had a way of calling Livingston "son" that irked the latter. He interpreted it as a measure of respective bulks, whereas no such idea ever entered the mind of the big man. Stoddard said

" son " because somehow he felt himself to be older and infinitely wiser than his companion, and just at present responsible for his safety and his conduct. In actual years Livingston was thirty-four, Stoddard but thirty.

" If I live here a year I won't like it any better," complained Livingston. " I'm all tired out now."

" And a good thing for you. You'll sleep like a dead man to-night, Larry. That's one of the things the doctor said you needed — sleep."

" He didn't happen to prescribe a comatose condition resulting from physical collapse, did he? " inquired Livingston, still trying to work the kinks out of his shoulders and legs. " I don't believe he ever meant for me to go against anything like this. He doesn't understand how it is up here."

" Ah, but he does understand! " observed Stoddard, amusement still lighting his blue eyes as he watched his unhappy friend. " He's been here himself — with me.

" And do you know what he told me, Larry? He said to give it to you good and plenty. Those were the exact terms of his prescription —' good and plenty.' He said you needed it worse than any young man he ever saw.

" He told me to take you where you wouldn't see an all-night restaurant for a month and where you couldn't hear the honk of a taxi', even with the help of a long-distance telephone.

" That's why you're here, son. Don't tell me I didn't go into all the details of the treatment before we started. I know it. In the first place you

wouldn't have understood, if I'd tried to explain; in the second place you wouldn't have come at all. But it isn't going to hurt you; it's more likely to be the making of you.

"No wonder you're sunburnt. You've kept that precious hide of yours under roofs and awnings for so long that it's as tender as a baby's. Cheer up, Larry!"

Livingston's glance rested for a moment on the tangle of trees and underbrush a few yards from where they stood.

"But when you said coming up to the woods," he began, "I thought —"

"You thought it was like Central Park; I know," nodded Stoddard. "Central Park is your idea of the woods — a lot of nice, respectable shade-trees scientifically trimmed and all the holes patched with concrete, set out at artistic intervals on a beautiful green lawn.

"That's only a Noah's-ark woods, Larry — the kind you buy in the toy department. You're looking at the real thing now, son.

"And you've seen your last lawn for several weeks. Central Park is all right — for the city. But this is the sort of stuff that belongs up here."

Stoddard swept his arm in a broad gesture toward the stretch of lake that lay before them. Deep-water slept without a ripple. A dazzling, golden band of light stretched across to the opposite shore, pointing the way to a sun that would soon be slipping down behind the tree-tops. The air was still and the quiet was complete.

But the quiet was not silence. A chipmunk sat on a cedar stump and chattered at his visitors. At intervals the quavering cry of a loon echoed from some hidden cove. A fish leaped close to the rock where they stood, making a cool, tinkling splash as it fell back into the water.

"Just the way it grew," murmured Stoddard. "Look, Larry! Isn't it great?"

"Perhaps," assented Livingston grudgingly. "How about eating? I suppose it'll be crackers and cold water."

"Better not insult your cook," laughed Stoddard. "You can eat crackers and drink water if you like. I'm going to have a feed."

"How soon?"

Livingston's hunger was becoming a counter-irritant for his woes.

"After I make camp. No; don't touch anything. You take a rest. I'll attend to things."

With swift reaches into the canoe, Stoddard began depositing duffel on the rock that served as a landing-place. Blanket-pack, tent, grub-sacks, and all came out, after which the lightened craft was lifted bodily in a pair of huge arms and deposited, bottom up, among the bushes close to the shore.

Stoddard knew the island as well as he knew his own room at home; in fact, in the last five years he had slept on the island almost as often as in his bed in the city. When he was not working he fled the city for Deepwater, where the solitude of the big north woods enslaved him. When he was working he was anywhere but in the city; in Peru sometimes,

in Brazil, in Korea — wherever there might be a bridge to build or a stretch of railway to lay.

But, just as Stoddard was one of the army of men who carry cities and civilization into the waste places, just so sternly did he flee from all such works each time a task was done. As for the waste places, he did not regard them as such, for he saw no waste in nature, even though it might be a bare, scarred mountainside or a stretch of yellow desert. These were all in the scheme of things, to him; if for nothing else, they were to be looked at.

Livingston watched him doubtfully as he swiftly set up the tent in which they were to sleep. What Stoddard would do with the arm-loads of hemlock boughs that he brought from somewhere in the depths of the tangled little wood that clothed the island the novitiate from the city had no idea. Nor, after they had been laid bough by bough on a level spot of earth, did he even so much as guess, until the tent and its sod cloth had been stretched over them.

"Think I can ever sleep on that stuff?" he asked doubtfully.

"Well, if you can't I'll chloroform you," said Stoddard. "But I'm willing to make a bet now that you won't be awake an hour after dinner."

Sitting on a log and eating his meals from a service of tin plate were satisfying to the hunger of Livingston, but not to his sense of comfort and luxury. He still grumbled.

"I'm not blaming you, Stod," he explained, "but I'll be hanged if I know how you stand it. How did you ever get the habit? You weren't

raised to it. What do you suppose Estelle Wallace would say if you ever tried to spring anything like this on her? Or Kitty Fitch?"

Stoddard smiled indulgently.

"I'm not asking Estelle or Kitty to try it, Larry."

"Well, some day you'll hook up, Stod, and if it isn't Estelle or Kitty, it'll be somebody in the crowd. And do you think you can find one of them who'll make a squaw out of herself to come up here, or turn herself into a globe-trotter for the fun of seeing you stick an iron girder across a cañon somewhere back of beyond?"

The big man laughed softly.

"Larry," he said, "you talk like a boy looking at a ball game through a knot-hole in the fence, who thinks the center-fielder is the only man on the job because he happens to be the only player he can see. If you'll get your eye away from that knot-hole you've been looking through all your life, and climb up on top of the fence, or buy yourself a grand-stand seat, you'll find there are a lot of people beside the Kittys and the Estelles playing the game.

"Mind you, I'm not criticizing the Kittys and the Estelles. They're nice, good girls, and they're all right. So are Central Park and Broadway. But the earth runs a bit beyond Broadway and the Park, and even beyond Fifth Avenue. And there are lots of people in the world beside the Kittys and the Estelles.

"It all depends on what you're looking for, son. Now, when I'm in Central Park I like Kitty. She fits it beautifully. Kitty and the Park harmonize.

When I'm on Fifth Avenue I like Estelle. The avenue was made for Estelle to walk on and she adorns it. But —"

Stoddard paused for an instant to rescue the coffee-pot, which threatened to slide into the embers.

"Well," he added, "I guess the answer is that I don't spend much time on the Avenue, or in Central Park."

"Talk all you like, Stod; but if I had the amount of experience you've had, I'd be a consulting engineer, and I'd have my office in New York, and I'd not stir out of it. That's what the big men are doing."

"Maybe I'll do it, too, some day — after things are all built up everywhere else."

To Livingston there was something disgusting in the spectacle of a man washing dishes. Hot, soapy water with a skim of grease made him shudder, although Stoddard seemed to find it an effective agent for his purpose and cheerfully sloshed his big hands around in the tin bucket as if he enjoyed his task. Occasionally he added a split log to the fire, which burned redly against the now somber background of evergreens. With the dark came a fresh coolness, and the feel of the night air exhilarated him.

It was with Livingston as predicted; sleep overtook the man who needed it. When his third cigarette had dropped half-smoked from his lips Livingston felt his shoulder shaken by a firm hand.

"Into the tent for you, Larry," Stoddard was saying. "You almost fell into the fire that time."

Drowsily he felt himself being propelled through an opening in the bobinet front. Then Livingston stretched himself on a blanket that seemed at first to support him lightly, then to yield gently beneath his weight so that he was sinking down, down, down —

A kick applied to the sole of his foot half-awakened him with a start.

"What did you do with the matches?" demanded the voice of Stoddard.

"Matches?"

"Sure. Matches."

"Matches!" repeated the drowsy voice of Livingston. "Why, I — Matches? Oh, yes. Matches — matches, matches, mat —"

His words trailed off into a snore.

Stoddard laughed and walked away from the tent.

"But what the deuce did I do with those matches?" he muttered.

He thrust his hands into the pockets of his trousers and began an exploration. It yielded no matches. He picked up his coat and repeated the search. No matches! With an exclamation of annoyance he began slapping his clothing, as if matches might spring forth from any part of it. He shoved his fingers into a breast-pocket of his shirt. It was empty. Then —

"The devil!"

Stoddard's exclamation was loud and heartfelt as he watched the blood drip from a finger that had been investigating the left breast-pocket.

"Wha — what's the matter?" demanded Liv-

ingston, as his head appeared at the opening in the tent.

"Oh, you woke that time, did you?"

"You yelled loud enough to wake a corpse. What's happened?"

"Nothing. I just pricked my finger."

"On what?"

"Oh, somebody left a price-tag in the pocket of my shirt. Go to bed."

"They don't put price-tags in pockets. I don't see —"

"They put one in this pocket, anyhow," Stoddard interrupted. "Back in the blankets, Larry."

Livingston's curiosity, aroused for an instant, was presently overcome by a return of somnolence. Mumbling something about tags, he crawled back to his couch.

Stoddard made no move to reëxamine his pocket until he was assured that his charge was slumbering again. He was fully acquainted with that person's thirst for knowledge of things which did not concern him, and he knew instinctively that this was something that was solely his own affair. Also, he knew there was no price-tag in the pocket.

There was a pin there; also a piece of paper. He felt both. The pin had pricked him and the paper had crumpled under his fingers. It was not a tag.

He made his way to the fire and sat down, his back to the tent. With a final glance to satisfy himself that the prying eyes of Livingston were not watching him, he began to explore the pocket with cautious fingers. The pin pricked him again, but he

bore the infliction stoically. At last he located the head and drew it out. After that came the paper.

It had been folded several times; as Stoddard smoothed it he observed that its cheap texture was ruled with faint blue lines. Holding it close to the glow of the fire, this is what he read:

Hello there, Mr. 44 —

Do you like your job lasoing cows I would Its in the movies all the time and I'm crazy about it — I hate my job it's to shut up — I hate schrimps, to Wish I could live outdoors like you — Any job out your way for a girl who wants to lose the city Let me know if there is — *Please* If you ever worked in a factory you know what I mean — No. 18, packing dept Challenge Shirt Co. Buffalo N. Y. reaches me — Well youve got my number, Fourty-four — and Ive got yours. Dont forget that job — So long

P. S. You were in the movies to-night

Stoddard stared from the note into the embers; then turned his eyes to the paper again and reread it. A smile came to his lips. He lifted his head to laugh, but something checked him and his eyes became suddenly serious.

"The poor kid!" he said softly.

He studied the handwriting carefully. It was by no means bad. There was an untaught air about it, of course; punctuation and spelling faltered here and there; yet there was a certain character in it that surprised him. At any rate it was not weak.

The contents puzzled him. Clearly it was never meant for his eyes.

Who was "Mr. 44"? He gave it up. Evi-

dently a cowboy, from the context. Cowboys, he knew, frequented the picture-screen; he never did.

"Schrimps." That was another puzzler. Why did she hate them, granting that she meant "shrimps"? Sentence by sentence he pored over the message.

There were some things about it he liked. It did not cringe nor fawn. She hated her job, explained why, and did not lament. It was not sentimental. He had heard of love-sick maidens writing notes on eggs, or slyly sticking a correspondence-invitation in a box of strawberries; but this was different. Here was a factory-girl who wanted another kind of a job, said so, and let it go at that.

"Any job out your way?"

He wondered where she thought her message would go. Outdoors, at any rate. She made that clear.

There was one phrase that he read most of all — "a girl who wants to lose the city." Involuntarily Stoddard glanced back at the tent. He was thinking what Livingston would say to that.

To lose the city! The very thing Stoddard had been doing for nearly half his life — losing it, shunning it, returning to it under protest, fleeing it when he could.

Larry, snoring in the blankets, could not understand that — but he could. Estelle and Kitty could not understand, either. They were all of the city, captives who would not be free if their bonds were loosed. It was their life, beyond which they could conceive no other.

Himself they rather pitied. Even his mother and sister pitied him; but they were impatient with him, too. They saw no reason why the four quarters of the globe called to him; why he would sooner live under the open sky than in a mansion; why he was forever tramping off to some wilderness, to seek what they thought was privation, rather than to accept ease and comfort where men had made life a luxury. Stoddard had never attempted much explanation. They would not understand.

But here was a strange sort of girl, he thought, as he read the letter again. Here was no Kitty nor Estelle, hiding from the sun under a parasol, or shrinking within the glass walls of a limousine from a breeze that might set her cheeks and ears tingling.

Here was a girl who wanted air! The city was too shut up! She would "lose it"! A new kind of girl to Stoddard.

He wondered what she was like. Some pinch-cheeked creature, probably, pining for escape from the four walls of a city factory; yet the letter breathed a certain spirit of robustness that he could not associate with this picture.

Illiterate, of course. That, also, was a new type to Stoddard. Estelle and Kitty spelled and punctuated perfectly and wrote the most charming and conventional notes.

He found himself very curious concerning No. 18. What sort of a name did she have? Was she pretty? How old? What sort of a job did she want, outdoors?

"She's got the big idea as a foundation, anyhow,"

he said, half aloud. "I never met that kind. Wants to lose the city — and all the ones that I know are moving the other way!"

The fire burned low while Stoddard smoked and thought, the letter from the girl who wanted to live outdoors still between his fingers. For an hour he sat motionless, most of the time staring across the dying coals to where stars were faintly reflected in the dark water. Then he roused himself, reached for his coat, and began fumbling in the pockets. He found what he thought.

"I think I'll find out some more about No. 18," he muttered, as he hunted for some blank pages in a note-book.

CHAPTER IV

STODDARD BEATS THE PORTAGE

THE composition of a letter addressed to a mere number, by the light of a fading campfire, with a knee as a desk and a stub of pencil as a substitute for a pen, was not the simplest of tasks for Stoddard. He had written field reports under conditions infinitely worse, and had even made intricate mathematical calculations in a fever-swamp, where the ticks and mosquitoes supplied constant diversion; but this was different.

It was easy enough to begin—"Dear Miss No. 18." But when he had written that he paused a long time. If it had been destined for Kitty or Estelle he would not have hesitated, for there were set rules and forms for the Kitty and Estelle type. No. 18 was not merely an unfamiliar species; she was also an unnamed one. He felt like an archer letting fly an arrow toward the sun.

Yet doubts and difficulties could not interfere now, for Stoddard had determined that a letter should be written — which settled it. It was merely a matter of material and method; the adventure itself had been fixed upon.

He found the task far more difficult than computing factors of safety, or running a mountain-line with a five-per-cent. grade limit. For a while he was un-

decided whether to be in light or serious mood. He reread the letter that came in his olive-drab shirt and endeavored to adopt the spirit of it; he would be serious without being solemn. Also, he would try to be cheerful without being frivolous.

One thing he would not be — sentimental. Stoddard was far from being devoid of sentiment. He had a full man's share of it. But he had a horror of sentimentality. Between the two he recognized a wide gulf.

It was no trouble for him to avoid sentimentality. He merely applied to the letter destined for Miss No. 18 an unconscious yet invariable rule of his own — anybody might read anything he wrote without bringing a blush to his cheeks.

Once fairly under way, the letter ran along easily enough. It was not very long. After inspecting his work Stoddard was satisfied with it.

To obtain an envelope was to risk awakening Larry, but it was a chance that had to be taken. There was a small pack that contained a few envelopes; this Larry was using as a pillow. But now he was too deep in slumber to be aroused by a mere disturbance of his head, while his own snores blotted out the gentle rustling noise made by Stoddard's hands.

Stoddard stepped softly back to the camp-fire and looked at his watch. It was nearly ten o'clock. He wanted to get that letter in the mail. To-morrow there would be no chance, for Livingston, fretful and demanding attention, would be on his hands.

He remembered that the south-bound night mail

stopped at Deepwater Station at eleven forty. That meant ten miles of paddling, with the issue in doubt at the finish. Nor was he particularly desirous of paddling back to camp again, even if he made the train.

There was one alternative — the Lower Station. The south mail would not reach there until eleven fifty. The Lower Station was merely a lonely platform in the woods, built where the railroad line touched one of the deeply indented bays of Deepwater. It had been established with a view to the convenience of patrons of the hotel on Deepwater Island; but, although it offered a shorter route to that hostelry, it was so little used that trains no longer made it as a regular stop, halting only on signal.

From Stoddard's camp the all-water route to the Lower Station was even longer than that to Deepwater postoffice, for it involved the skirting of a considerable peninsula. But there was another route, far shorter, if more toilsome. It meant a portage across the neck of the peninsula — not more than half a mile — while the total paddling would be cut to six.

" It's the best bet," he assured himself.

Cautiously he lifted the canoe from its resting-place in the bushes and carried it to the water. As he stepped in he glanced up the slope toward the tent.

" He's good till morning," muttered Stoddard.

He paddled noiselessly until a hundred yards lay between the canoe and the island, which now, save

for the faint glow of the fire, lay a dark blur against the high ground of the mainland. Then he began to dip his blade deeply, and the canvas craft leaped ahead through the darkness.

Stoddard laid a course diagonally across the northeast arm of the lake. He knew there would be more than three miles of going before he touched the end of the portage. By daylight the trip to the Lower Station would be one of comparative leisure within the time limit allotted to him. In the dark of an early September night it became something of a problem. The portage was what gave him concern.

At best it was poor — rock nearly all of the way, with a sharp drop at the farther end, and scores of ankle-twisting holes and crevices. It was three years since he had crossed it, so that the chances of running into a tangle of underbrush and fallen trees were excellent; for Stoddard knew the route was traveled less than half a dozen times a season, and then only by guides or Indians who were in a hurry to make a particular journey and did not mind its difficulties. As for the forest rangers, they never took the trouble to keep it cut out.

Stoddard liked to travel at night. The coolness of the air against his bare throat and arms exhilarated him. He loved the silence that enveloped him. The woods country, with only the stars looking down upon it, quickened his imagination. He felt the mystery of it; yet, somehow, as if he were nearer to its secret than when the sun searched out every recess of lake and hills.

The sentinel pines that stood in isolation on the ridges were dead black against the sky; they were self-reliant, aloof, vigilant — watching over the forest that slept. The lapping of the water against the bow of the canoe had a different note at night; the faintly moving breeze had a different odor, with a fresh dampness born only of the darkness. These were hours when Stoddard felt he was permitted to touch gently the pulse of the slumbering wilderness.

The canoe ran on swiftly. As it came within the increasing gloom of the opposite shore he altered the course slightly and ran close to the bank. The way to the portage was through a little cove, easy to miss even in daylight, and he had no time to waste in haphazard search. His eyes intent upon the rocks and trees at his left, he moved ahead at slower pace for a couple of hundred yards until, with a nod of satisfaction, he turned the bow sharply inland. The canoe entered a tiny, sheltered bay.

Instinctively his paddle paused in mid air and Stoddard cocked an ear forward. For several seconds he listened thus; then called in a low tone:

"Ho, boy!"

The answer was abrupt, and would have been startling to a man not expecting it.

The sharp snort of a moose came as a challenge through the darkness, followed by a heavy splash. Then, in quick succession, came a series of plunges in the shallow water of the cove. An instant later there was a tearing and crashing of underbrush, followed by the noise of cracking saplings and the thudding of heavy feet. It was as if a whirlwind had

suddenly been loosed in the forest, or the mail train itself had left the steel line and was running wild.

For a full minute Stoddard sat motionless, listening to the fading din. Then there was silence again. He dipped his paddle.

"Late hours, my friend," he said with a laugh. "But I wish I could travel like that after dark!"

Moose are plentiful in the Deepwater country, and Stoddard knew the swampy little cove, with its rushes and water-lilies, to be a popular haunt.

"Queer how a voice startles them," he mused, as he pushed the canoe through a patch of grass until the bow touched the shore. "I've no doubt he heard me for a hundred yards back and never budged until I spoke."

Stoddard's fears for the condition of the portage were not without ground. He poked about for several minutes in the darkness, and finally lighted a match before he found the entrance to the faint trail. Then, lashing the paddles crosswise on the thwarts, he lifted the canoe, swung it over his head with a rolling motion, and settled it easily on his shoulders.

"Now to see if my feet remember anything," he said as he pushed forward into the woods.

As for any aid his eyes would offer in keeping to the path, they might as well have been blindfolded. The portage was as dark as a tunnel. But Stoddard had a woodsman's recollection of places; he traveled by a series of mental maps. His legs possessed a subconscious memory of routes they had once followed, and he was putting his trust in them now.

The first two hundred yards of the carry was the easiest part, but he had covered less than half of this when he became aware that the little used trail was annoyingly obstructed with new forest growth. Underbrush clutched at his legs and tried to trip him. Young branches brushed their wet leaves against the smooth sides of the canoe, now and again pressing it so closely from both sides as to check his progress. His seventeen-foot burden gave him no concern on the score of weight, but it was difficult to guide its awkward bulk where he could not see half its length ahead of him.

There were sharp turns in the path; thus, long before his cautiously placed feet reached them, the canoe would project into the tangle beyond, so that he would have to halt and back off until the bow swung clear again. Once the stem of the craft ran squarely into a solid tree-trunk, bringing him to a jarring stop that made his teeth click. It was slow work.

When the rise began the going became worse. He took no step without feeling well in front of him with outstretched foot. Stoddard was not inviting a sprained ankle or a broken leg. A fallen tree that he remembered well still lay across the path, but there was another of more recent date that had no place in his mind-map.

He discovered it by the simple method of falling over it. It struck him almost waist-high, and the momentum of the burden on his shoulders carried him across it. For a few seconds the impact of his head against the stony path bewildered him. As he tenderly examined the aching spot with his fingers,

a warm dampness told him there was a cut as well as a bruise.

But his legs and arms concerned him more than his head, for the task he had set himself was peculiarly theirs. Stoddard was satisfied to discover that they had suffered no damage.

The canoe lay across him; when he crawled from under it he hastily passed his hands over the outer canvas. More luck; there were no holes in it.

"I'll remember that tree," he said philosophically, as he shouldered his burden again.

The path grew worse and worse as the grade increased, but he expected this. In fact, the sharper the incline the nearer he was to the top. He was thankful for the new hob-nails in the soles of his hunting-boots, for they clung faithfully where he planted them. He shunned shoe-packs where the going was rough.

The ground became level again, but he doubled his caution. The smooth spot was one of the tricks of the portage, to delude the unwary after nightfall. It was but the threshold to a steep incline, bad enough to negotiate by day and a real danger in darkness. A few steps brought him to the edge of it.

Then he descended. Loose stones moved under his feet, and often he had to kick them aside to find safe ground. It needed not their crashing through the brush to tell him that the hillside was precipitous and treacherous.

Again he fell, but a sapling about which he flung a groping arm stopped a headlong plunge. His back

throbbed where it had disputed possession of space with a bowlder, and the new olive-drab shirt ripped at the shoulder. Once more he examined the canoe with solicitous hands; then grimly lifted it again to his shoulder and resumed his descent.

"Two falls," he muttered. "Usually there's a third."

There was. It came near the bottom of the hill. The canoe finished the remainder of the distance without him.

"Talk about a moose making a racket!" he exclaimed. "The noise that old bull made was like a whisper alongside of me."

He found the canoe when the end of it barked a shin, picked it up in one hand, as an impatient mother grabs a fretful child, and lugged it forward unceremoniously to the water's edge. It floated without leaking.

A few yards from shore Stoddard glanced upward at the height just crossed. It seemed fairly to overhang the waters of Island Bay. His head throbbed, his back ached, his hands and arms smarted from a score of scratches; yet he chuckled.

"Well, I beat you, old man!" he said, saluting his enemy. "But you gave me a good run for it."

Half-way across the bay he ceased paddling for an instant to wipe the sweat from his eyes and plunge his arms elbow-deep into the water.

"No. 18," he muttered reflectively, as he patted the breast-pocket of his shirt, "you'll never know what a compliment you're getting to-night."

Island Bay was named for obvious reasons. It

cannot be crossed in a direct line from shore to shore, for the canoe route is devious, finding its way by many turnings through the narrow channels that divide the islands.

But this was easy for Stoddard. He drove his craft onward without hesitation. He paddled swiftly, too, for all his lameness and bruises. There was boyish exultation of spirit within him. He felt that he had done something worth while.

Clear of the islands, there was but a mile to go. He lighted a match and glanced at his watch. There was still time to make the train, but none for loafing. The portage had taken far longer than the time he had allowed for it.

The distant but distinct whistle of a locomotive warned him to be alert as he ran the canoe alongside a neglected wharf. He hastened up the path that led to the Lower Station, again feeling in his pocket to make sure that his letter was safe.

"I feel like writing a postscript," he said as he stepped upon the dimly lighted platform. "I will!"

Standing under the station light, he withdrew the letter from its unsealed envelope and added a few words to the bottom.

"Wonder if she'll understand that?" he remarked, laughing, as he sealed the envelope.

Then he turned the signal-light so that the red eye, instead of the green, looked up the track.

"Good! Catch um train for me," said a quiet voice at his elbow.

Stoddard whirled quickly and looked down at a small man whose approach had been noiseless.

"Why, hello, John!" he cried heartily.

A white man would have winced under the hand-grip bestowed upon him, but the Indian merely grinned, although he was not insensitive to the vise-like pressure.

"You come yesterday," he remarked.

"That's right. Camped over on the Northeast Arm."

"Sure!" nodded the Indian. "I know. Go back to-night?"

"Not much. I'll be here for a month, I imagine. Just came over to mail a letter."

There was a flicker of surprise in the Indian's eyes.

"Hurry-up letter — eh? You run short of something?"

"No, we're not short. But the letter happened to be important, so I brought it over to catch the train."

The condition of Stoddard's clothing and the marks upon his hands and arms were not lost upon John.

"How you come?" he asked.

"Took the old portage across the neck. No time to go around."

Again the Indian gravely inspected him.

"Big hurry-up letter!" was his only comment.

The headlight of an approaching train dazzled Stoddard's eyes for an instant, and the sound of grinding brakes reached the pair on the platform.

"Mail letter for you?" asked John.

"I wish you would," said Stoddard gratefully, feeling in his pockets for money to pay the postage. "You won't forget it?"

"Mail him first thing," promised the Indian as he took the letter.

"And where are you going?"

"Red Lake. Back to-morrow maybe. Next day, anyhow."

The train stopped and the Indian swung aboard.

"Come over and see us, John," called Stoddard as the air-brakes loosened their grip with a sigh and the darkened cars slowly resumed their journey down-grade.

"Sure! I come. Mail letter now."

Stoddard stood on the lonely platform until the tail-lights of the retreating train vanished in the blackness. It was midnight, and camp was a long journey. Were it not for Livingston alone on the island he would have stripped a few hemlocks for bedding, stretched himself under the canoe, and made a night of it where he was. But Larry, helpless and timid novice, could not be left to shift for himself. He could not even make tea for breakfast.

Reluctant at the thought of more than two hours' travel before he reached his blankets, Stoddard went slowly down to the landing and launched the canoe. The longest way around would be his homeward route. Having conquered the portage once, he did not propose to give it a return battle.

As he crossed the Island Bay and headed toward the point of the peninsula, Stoddard's mind was try-

ing to create a picture. The scene was a room in a shirt-factory. He imagined it cluttered, crowded, and unattractive. Persons were running about nervously and irritably. There were haggard girls working at machines, limp as the garments that passed through their fingers. The air was hot and vitiated.

One of the girls in his picture was No. 18, yet he could not clearly pick her out. Sometimes she was dark, sometimes fair; now she was plain of face, and again she was pretty. But she was always tired and wan, and there was ever a look of yearning in her eyes.

No. 18! She was not really a person at all. She was merely a part of a factory — a numbered part. Stoddard had never thought of girls simply as numbers. The Kittys and the Estelles possessed personalities, however inconsequential they might be; they had the right to be known as individuals. They ranked as human beings! But No. 18 — she was merely a mathematical item.

It was nearly three o'clock when he landed at the island, and he knew instantly by the brightly blazing fire that Larry was awake. As his steel-shod boots scraped on the rocks a voice from the tent called sharply:

"Who's that?"

Stoddard laughed silently at the apprehension in the tone.

"Stoddard!" he answered as he hauled out the canoe.

"Where in blazes have you been?" demanded

Livingston, emerging into the firelight. "I woke up and — and —"

"Just went out for a little paddle," said Stoddard.

"That's a nice trick! Leaving a man all alone in a hole like this!" the other exploded. "Suppose anything happened to you! Who'd find me? What would I do?"

"Why, you could just wait for things to freeze up and walk ashore, Larry. There's lots of grub."

"But I say, Stod, it's not fair! It's —"

"Tut, Larry; you're interrupting me," chided Stoddard as he pushed his way into the tent.

"Interrupting! What have you got to do?"

"Sleep, son."

But in Buffalo at that same hour there was no slumber for Sadie Hicks. In her nightgown, with her golden-bronze hair hanging in two thick plaits across her deep bosom, she sat on the edge of her cot, staring half hypnotized into the spitting point of gas-flame, repining over her letter that went astray — wondering, puzzling, scheming. And through all the bemused tangle of her thought there ran — felt rather than expressed — the call of the great outdoors.

CHAPTER V

SADIE GETS A LETTER

THE fifty-cent fine did not annoy Sadie. She paid it on Saturday night — or rather observed that it had been accurately deducted from her envelope — and the incident was dismissed from her mind. But a new trouble had come to dwell with her. The cutting-room boss was responsible for it.

Sadie had never taken any particular notice of him; he was merely a colorless "medium." It surprised her therefore, when he devised an opportunity to talk to her at the noon hour.

Sadie was not unaware of her own charms, for she was intelligent and human. When the cutting-room boss sat beside her on the bench where she was eating her sandwich she sighed therefore, for she interpreted the attention merely as the beginning of another affair that would have to be slain in its early youth.

She was indignant, too; for No. 26 was the girl who had always received his attentions, and No. 26 was Sadie's friend. She had an astonished contempt for his fickleness, as well as a stout loyalty to the feather-brained little brunette at the next table.

The cutting-room boss was indirect and mysteri-

ous of speech, circumstances which explained Sadie's puzzled expression and the fact that she did not clearly understand him for several minutes. When she finally discerned the point at which he was aiming in wabbly fashion she was at first amused, then doubly resentful.

The cutting-room boss was not disloyal to No. 26; he was not "making a play" for himself. He was an emissary, an ambassador, truly extraordinary — and his credentials were from the Shrimp!

When Sadie came to a realization of this she made a slow and careful survey of the person of the cutting-room boss, which is a woman's preface to remarks that are about to be made. He bore the scrutiny with what composure a man can assume under such circumstances — very little.

Even a man who is immaculately correct in person and raiment, and knows it, is not immune to the effects of feminine eyes that coldly inspect, review, and estimate; doubt of himself is at once born in his mind. And the cutting-room boss was not immaculate.

He shuffled his feet, coughed, and glanced about the room, only to encounter the cold glare of No. 26.

"You see, Ferguson's all right," he went on hastily. "Only he's quick sometimes. He's got lots of worries in this here department. And y' can't blame him so much. He feels awful bad, Sadie, about that fine."

"Fine?" repeated Sadie, wrinkling her forehead. "Oh, you mean last week, I guess. This is Monday. I forgot all about it. I balance the

books every Saturday night and carry nothin' over."

"Well, he does feel bad," continued the ambassador. "He'd like to make it up some way if he could — throw some extra time in your way maybe. There's going to be some rush work soon, and some of the girls'll be pullin' down a little loose change gettin' the stuff out. He'd like to be friends, too."

"Dear me!" said Sadie.

"Sure! He feels you and him ain't got no good cause to scrap. Little spats are all in the day's work; they don't count after the gong rings."

"So?"

"Even Mame and I have 'em," he confessed.

Sadie did him the honor of another inspection, looked across the room, bestowed a fleeting wink upon No. 26, and said:

"Let's you and me get down to plain talk, Mr. Schwartz."

"Sure! Sure!" he assented.

"I'll shoot questions and you answer."

"Sure — all right, Sadie."

"Did the Shrimp send you to me?"

"The who?"

"Ferguson."

"Well, he kinda suggested that I might —"

"Might what?"

"Oh, just have a little talk! Y' see, he don't quite feel —"

"You've got him right," interrupted Sadie. "He's one of those 'don't-quite' folks. So he sent you to fix things up with me?"

"Well, if you wanta put it that way, I suppose he did."

"Like the job?" inquired Sadie sweetly.

"I consider I'm doin' a friend a favor," said the cutting-room boss defensively. "I'd do as much for any friend."

"Don't seem to me," mused Sadie, "that I'd care a whole lot about bein' a phonograph record for a shrimp. Seems to me I'd feel I was playin' a pretty punk tune, Mr. Schwartz. Ever give it the once-over from that angle?"

"I ain't done nothin' wrong, I hope," said Schwartz stiffly.

"All right — maybe not. But listen: I don't think it's a man's job to run errands for a shrimp. I expect you call yourself a man; I'll take a chance on it, anyhow. No, I'm not mad at you; that ain't worth while, Mr. Schwartz. I'm just sorry — for the cuttin' department. I got friends who work there.

"Now, you can tell the Shrimp — not as a message from me, because I ain't sendin' messages to him through third parties or any other way — you can just advise him like a friend to keep away from No. 18. Just sort of give him your opinion that things look kinda bad; high winds prevailin' from the northeast, or something like that.

"You get the idea. Because, you see, he's little and he ain't as careful as he might be, and he oughta have somebody advise him. I don't mind if you tell him I'm heavy-footed and clumsy sometimes, and I don't always look where I'm goin'. Honest, I'd

feel awful mean if I happened to step on him, Mr. Schwartz."

The cutting-room boss, red in the cheeks, went back to his department. Sadie finished her sandwich.

"What was he sayin', Sadie?" whispered No. 12 as the gong rang and the packing of shirts began again.

"Just singin' one of those light-opera gems, deary."

No. 12 did not pursue her inquiry. When Sadie wanted to talk she talked; when she did not it was useless to urge her.

But the day was not over for Sadie. It was destined to be marked on her calendar in flaming red. And give the Shrimp credit for this.

He stopped at her table and said in a low voice: "You insulted a friend of mine, No. 18."

"Any friend of yours is welcome to the same, Mr. Ferguson," answered Sadie cordially.

"I won't stand fer it!"

"Sure you won't."

"Friends of mine are entitled to be treated respectful in my department. Y' understand?"

"No."

"Well, you'll understand it after that!" he snarled. "I'll make you!"

"You're botherin' me," said Sadie. "Interruptin' my work. I'm here to work and not to talk to friends of yours. So long as I do what I'm paid for you've got no kick. Run, now!"

The Shrimp went away, but with an idea in his

mind that Sadie had unconsciously planted. She was there to work, was she? He intended to see whether she did.

So the Shrimp spent the next hour watching. There was something almost like a glitter in his eyes when he next approached Sadie's table.

"You only packed two boxes in the last half-hour," he announced for the room to hear.

"Correct," said Sadie. "Been waitin' for order-slips."

"Whadda you call those?"

The Shrimp pointed to half a dozen sheets of paper that lay on the table. Sadie looked down at them in surprise, then back at her accuser.

"They weren't there ten seconds ago," she observed.

"They been there twenty minutes; I seen them."

"I think you just slipped 'em there yourself, Ferguson," said Sadie composedly.

"You mean to say —"

"That you put 'em there? Yes, I'll say it. Now I got a good look at you, I'll bet on it."

The Shrimp's eyes narrowed. He contemplated Sadie for several seconds. Then he inhaled as large a breath as a thirty-four-inch chest will accommodate.

"I'm tired finin' you," he said shrilly.

"Oh, don't quit now, Ferguson. You're just goin' good."

"Get your hat!"

"Say it plain," advised Sadie.

"You're fired!"

A beatific smile adorned Sadie's face.

"Honest?" she said eagerly.

"Go ahead; you're fired!" repeated the Shrimp importantly.

Sadie clasped her hands and laughed.

"Really and truly fired?" she cried. "Bounced? Discharged? Turned loose on a cruel world?"

The Shrimp looked disappointed, but he nodded. He never did understand Sadie.

"Girls," she exclaimed, turning to the roomful, "my dream's out! I'm fired! It's a shame to make you jealous, but I can't help it. Say, No. 21, you're the prize dancer. Do some steps for me; I don't know how. Just think! Fired!"

Sadie started toward the locker-room almost on a run. Her apron was already off, and she was patting a great coil of bronze hair into place. Suddenly she stopped long enough to call back:

"Shrimp, you're almost a friend of mine!"

The departure of Sadie from the packing department of the Challenge Shirt Company partook of the dignity of an event. If the room had been under military discipline its occupants could not have stood more rigidly at attention. Not a hand moved, not a whisper sounded as she walked like a queen toward the door that opened into the hall. Even the Shrimp, himself spellbound, forgot to fret because the wheels of progress were momentarily halted.

Pausing at the threshold, Sadie turned and waved a last good-by.

"So-long, girls! Cheer up! Some day your luck'll come."

Down the stairway that led past the office went, not No. 18, but plain Sadie Hicks.

"I hope I did it dignified," she murmured with a little laugh. "Maybe I made that laugh business a little too strong; but I meant some of it, anyhow. It feels sort of good to be fired — and excitin'."

She halted at the office window and rapped on the glass with her time-clock key.

"I'm turnin' this in, Mr. Halsey," she said to the clerk who answered her call.

"Leaving?"

"Uh-huh."

"I'm sorry, Sadie. What's the trouble?"

"Oh, nothin'. Only I couldn't wait for the board of directors to act on my resignation."

"You've been with us quite a while, Sadie."

"That's right; I've packed some shirts in my time."

"If there's been any trouble I'd be glad —"

"Sure. You're all right, Mr. Halsey. I know you'd do what you could. But you couldn't get me back there for the general manager's salary."

The clerk turned to a row of pigeon-holes alongside the window and tossed Sadie's key into the box numbered eighteen. Then something caught his eye. He reached up and took out an envelope.

"This for you?" he asked, pushing it across the counter.

Sadie picked it up for examination. Then she blushed a deep red and glanced at the clerk. He was smiling.

"Yes, it's for me," said Sadie, with confusion in

her voice. "But don't you say anything to the girls, Mr. Halsey! Please!"

"All right; I won't. Only, Sadie —"

The middle-aged clerk looked at her with a kindly eye. "You're not going to do anything foolish?"

Sadie thrust out her hand and gave him a steady grip.

"I know you mean that right, Mr. Halsey. Thanks! No, I'm not goin' to do anything foolish. Nothin' like that ever bothered me. Good-by."

"Good-by, Sadie. But wait a second! I guess you've got a day's pay coming to you."

"Give it to the Shrimp; buy him a bouquet with it," called back Sadie, who was at the street door.

Outside, she paused to read the address on the envelope —

No. 18,
Packing Department,
Challenge Shirt Company,
Buffalo, N. Y.

She studied the postmark — Canadian!

"So that's where it went!" she whispered. "Canada!"

Her finger was under the flap of the envelope, about to tear it open, when she hesitated.

"No; I'm excited now," she said. "I'll wait till I get home. This ain't a joke; it's business."

Whereupon she thrust the envelope into the bosom of her waist and started off at a brisk walk. Sadie

was different from many girls; she had her own methods of self-discipline.

Seated on her bed in the seven-by-ten room, she deliberately opened the envelope and unfolded its contents. In the upper corner of the first sheet she read:

Deepwater Station,
Ontario, Canada.

She paused and glanced up, her eyes half closed. "Deepwater Station!" she repeated. "Deepwater! That sounds *good.*" She returned to her letter:

DEAR MISS 18:

Why did you stick a pin in me? So that I would not forget? If so, your plan succeeded. I am still nursing my finger.

"O-h!" whispered Sadie. "I didn't mean to do that!"

It's rather awkward, just to know a number; perhaps if you write again you'll send me your name. But use no pins! I'll begin by sending you mine — it's Stoddard, with a John in front, and the address is above.

I am not sure you meant this letter for me; I have an idea that I intercepted the mail of some cow-punching gentleman. I'm not Mr. 44. I never carried a .44 in my life. A .38 shoots enough lead, and I rarely carry one of those.

"He doesn't understand," sighed Sadie.

I like my job better than any I can think of and I'm mighty sorry you're not equally contented with yours.

Where did you ever get that big, healthy idea of yours, about outdoors? Surely not in the city where you live, nor in the factory where you work!

"Did work," corrected Sadie.

However you managed to lay hold of it, don't lose it! It's right. Some day you may have a good chance. Take it. Outdoors is the place that needs people. There are too few of us. The city cheats.

"That's it!" exclaimed Sadie. "He knows. It does cheat!"

I haven't looked around up here yet to see if there are any jobs for girls who want to live outdoors. If there are none, there ought to be! A girl with the big idea should have her chance. I'd be glad to hear more about that ambition of yours. Will you let me?

Up here there is nothing but outdoors — big and genuine, and without the trimmings. You'd like to see a forest that never had a lumberman's ax laid on it, mountains that haven't been blasted, a lake you can drink from, and all about you air that you can fairly bite. At least, I get the idea from your letter that you'd like it.

"Would I!" she said softly.

Now, about that job. I promise not to forget. Something may turn up; in fact, I'll try to turn it up. Meantime please regard me as at your service. Any time I can do anything for you, don't fail to call on me.

Sadie paused again and stared at the white wall opposite.

"I wonder if this is the time," she mused.

I don't like that number of yours — 18. I shall think of you as Miss Outdoors until you send me a better name. Keep hoping; you'll get there yet.

Sincerely,

JOHN STODDARD.

Sadie was awed. It was hard to believe that such a letter could be written — to her! Of course he was not a cowboy.

"He's educated!" she whispered.

How well he seemed to understand! She did not realize how plain she had made her dream in the little note that was pinned to a pocket. Perhaps he was a "swell." She could easily believe it. But he was a man, too; she knew that. He had a good, plain name; she liked it. And he was a forty-four, even if he did not know it! Sadie smiled faintly.

She went back to the paragraph about the outdoors where he lived and read it again — hungrily. Would she ever see it, save within the walls of her imagination? He hinted that she might. He promised to try to get her a job.

A job! Sadie's mind flew swiftly from the future to the present. A job was what she needed, first of all things. She could afford to lose no time about that; the bank-account was not big enough.

"There ought to be jobs," he said — jobs up there in Canada. Surely he must be a competent judge, for he lived there. What Sadie knew about Canada was contained in John Stoddard's letter, and she thirsted for little more knowledge at this time. It had a real outdoors; that was enough.

She glanced at her letter again, and noticed another paragraph, written on the back of one of the sheets:

P. S.— I have forgotten the pin-scratch, just as the man who fractured his skull falling down-stairs forgot that he stubbed his toe as a starter. You ought to see me now!

"I don't know just what happened to you, Forty-Four, but I guess your skull ain't fractured," she commented.

Sadie spent half an hour thinking. Then she went back to the letter again to make sure of something. Yes, he had said it:

Any time I can do anything for you don't fail to call on me.

"He means that," said Sadie, with a nod. "Forty-fours don't lie. And he *can* do something for me. He can get me that outdoors job. I will call!"

There was an hour before supper, and Sadie went out. When she returned she sat down to study a handful of time-tables.

"I'll call just as soon as I can get there, Forty-Four," she said resolutely. "I'll draw my money in the morning; the bank's closed now. It won't take me long to shop. I can't afford furs, but I'll do the best I can. Then I'll get my ticket. There won't be time to write. I'll have to wire."

CHAPTER VI

SADIE IS EN ROUTE

THE camp on the island resounded with the complaints of Larry Livingston. His sunburn was still punishing him; his couch was uncomfortable; he didn't like the feel of the heavy blankets; he revolted at tin plates and cups; he did not see why the bass should not bite every three minutes; he objected to the "unearthly" solitude of the nights; and he was convinced that the course of treatment prescribed for him would prove a final blow to his health.

Through it all Stoddard remained good-natured. Most of Larry's complaints, in fact, he ignored. He had expected wails of protest from his ward, and was therefore not enduring an unforeseen infliction.

"I'll admit the fishing might be a bit better," he said. "But in a big lake like this you can't always tell where a particular fish is going to be at a given moment. We'll do better by and by. John's coming around to see us pretty soon, and if there's any recent and reliable information about fish he'll have it."

"Who's John?" demanded Larry.

"He's the Indian I told you about, who can tote his own weight in duffel and scarcely notice it."

"Is he — er — safe?"

Stoddard laughed until his eyes glistened with tears.

"Safe! John's as safe as a bank. Did you think he was coming for scalps?"

A few minutes later Stoddard, pointing to a moving object on the surface of the lake, exclaimed:

"I'll bet that's John now! He seems to be in a hurry, too."

The Indian's dingy little canoe reached the island a quarter of an hour after Stoddard sighted it. He nodded familiarly to the big man and acknowledged an introduction to Livingston with a perfunctory handshake.

"What time you get home?" he asked Stoddard casually.

Stepping behind Livingston, Stoddard made a frantic gesture. His ward of the woods was still ignorant of the night journey to the Lower Station. A look of understanding flashed into John's eyes, and he did not pursue his inquiry.

"We were just talking about fishing, John," said Stoddard. "How about it?"

"Plenty; but not here."

"Where, then?"

"South Arm best now."

"More paddling!" groaned Larry.

"It'll do you good, son. You've rested up now for a couple of days. We'll find an island down that way that you may like better than this one."

"Good islands," confirmed the Indian.

Then, as Livingston's gaze wandered to the lake,

the Indian bestowed a wink upon Stoddard and made a gesture toward his own breast. Inasmuch as it was the first time Stoddard had ever seen an Indian wink, particularly one so self-contained as the wiry little John, he was astonished beyond measure.

Neither could he interpret the gesture. He began to wonder if John had turned jester at the expense of Larry; yet, if so, the joke was beyond his comprehension.

He knitted his brow and shook his head, whereupon the Indian gravely winked again and started to repeat the motion of his hand. He was interrupted as Livingston's glance returned to the party.

Stoddard's puzzlement increased. It was plain that John was trying to convey something to him in a covert manner. He had an idea that it concerned Livingston, and, therefore, was not to be communicated in Larry's presence. So, again stepping out of the range of Larry's vision, he signaled John to move up toward the tent.

The Indian obeyed with a pretense of examining the camp outfit.

Stoddard strolled after him. So did Livingston.

Then followed a series of maneuvers designed for the purpose of bringing Stoddard and his Indian visitor together, while leaving Livingston out of sight and ear-shot. But the third man unconsciously balked them all by dogging their footsteps. Plainly he did not propose to be left alone or ignored.

During this performance John succeeded in work-

ing Stoddard to a pitch of real excitement by his furtive pantomimes.

Presently the Indian abandoned his gestures and his winks and seated himself indifferently near the fire, from which he picked up a half-burned twig and began making idle scratches on the earth at his feet. Once he looked up and caught Stoddard's eye; then returned to the scratching again.

Stoddard watched the stick. It was describing a series of unintelligible hieroglyphics, which John occasionally erased with his moccasined feet and began anew.

The meaning dawned upon Stoddard at last! John was writing! When the Indian glanced up a second time he nodded that he understood. Thereupon John ceased scratching with the stick, but began tapping with the end of it carelessly upon a rock. The tapping was irregular and without cadence. To Stoddard it signified nothing for several moments.

Then he was struck by the persistence of it. There were taps close together, then intervals, then more taps in quick succession, with pauses and renewals. Stoddard began to grasp an idea.

"By the way, John," he remarked, "have they run the new telegraph line through yet — the branch over to Porcupine Lake?"

The Indian nodded vigorously and winked again.

So John had a telegram. Also it was a telegram that must, for some mysterious reason, be delivered in the utmost privacy.

Stoddard's thoughts at once flew to his home in

New York. He did not expect a business call; something must have happened in the family.

Perhaps it was something in Livingston's family. Larry had a mother who was an invalid, and Stoddard now had a vision of bad news to break.

"Say, John," he observed, "I've got a new rod here I want you to see. It's up in the tent, lying on the blankets. See what you think of it."

The Indian arose and ambled up to the canvas shelter, disappearing within it for an instant and returning with the rod in his hands.

"I meant for you to bring them both," said Stoddard. "Never mind; I'll get the other."

He went quickly to the tent, entered and let the flap fall after him. Lying on the blanket was a pink envelope.

Stoddard ripped it open swiftly. The date was Toronto, the time early morning. The message read:

JOHN STODDARD,
Deepwater Station, Ontario.
On my way. Will arrive six thirty-four to-night.
EIGHTEEN.

Stoddard was stunned.

Due at six thirty-four — that night! Had she suddenly gone mad, or had he? She was coming — here — to Deepwater — to see him! She was on the north-bound train even now!

"What'll I do?" he groaned. "Good Lord!"

Hearing Livingston stirring outside the tent, Stoddard shoved the telegram under his shirt. Larry

must not know at all costs — not yet, at any rate. He must have time to figure the thing out. Hastily picking up the other fishing-rod, he stepped outside and made a pretense at showing John the difference between the new and the old implements. But his mind was far from rods. It was upon a shining line of single track, along which a train was remorselessly toiling its way toward Deepwater.

Stoddard was trying to think quickly, but his mind was in utter confusion. There must be some way to stop her, yet he could not think of it. It was impossible — preposterous — for her to come out there to a wilderness. She would have to be sent back immediately, if she could not be headed off. Stoddard could not even go to meet her; there was Livingston to be looked after, and Stoddard would not and could not explain to him.

John would have to do it! That was the solution. He would send the Indian and let him make the best explanation he could.

But Livingston killed that hope.

"John says he'll take me where I can get some fish, Stod," he said. "Want to come?"

"No."

"All right; come on, John."

As Livingston started down toward the landing-place the Indian whispered softly to Stoddard:

"You mail letter quiet. I bring telegram quiet."

Stoddard made no sign that he appreciated this instinctive diplomacy upon the Indian's part. He was absorbed in his problem. As the canoe bore the pair away from the island and headed in the di-

rection of the South Arm, he sat heavily upon a log.

"You will answer letters, will you?" he demanded savagely, addressing himself.

He consulted the telegram again to see if there could be any possible mistake, but it was relentless in its clarity. She would be in Deepwater that very night. The train had moved miles since the blow had first fallen. It was coming nearer, even as he sat there.

"But why?" he kept asking himself. "Why?"

He had not told her to come; had not even suggested it. He remembered what he had written very distinctly. He did not say there was a job for her in the Deepwater country. He merely said there ought to be, and that he would look around. He had asked her to write, not to seize her hat and run for a train.

Very seriously now Stoddard began to doubt the mental balance of No. 18. Was it possible that any girl entirely sane could launch madly into such a venture and throw herself upon the hands of an absolute stranger?

From this doubt he proceeded to skepticism of the very existence of No. 18. He began to suspect that some huge practical joke was being played upon him, and that the perpetrators back in the Buffalo factory were carrying it out in elaborate detail. The notion chagrined and angered him. Stoddard had no relish for being the butt of a jest.

He took the crumpled letter of No. 18 from his pocket and read it again. Then the joke idea began

to fade from his mind. There was something in the atmosphere of it that gave it the stamp of genuineness; he could not fail to sense it.

Stoddard's dismay only increased as he reluctantly found himself forced to the belief that she was really on the way to Deepwater. There was no heading things off now. He had a problem to meet.

He glanced at his watch; there was plenty of time yet — more than three hours.

"I'll have to meet her, I suppose," he said aloud. "But what can I say to her? How can I explain? There's no job here that I know of. And she thinks she's going to get one!"

He had faced a few unpleasant situations in his life, but never anything like this. It appalled him, for he did not know how to meet it. He knew of no rules nor ceremonies that applied to it.

He must go to the station, meet her, and tell her — what? That he was only fooling? He shuddered at that, yet wondered if it did not really amount to as much. Certainly she would think so when she learned the truth of things.

Himself he blamed most. He realized that he should have known better than to paint a picture filled with rosy hopes for the eyes of an ignorant factory-girl. In the first place, he should not have written at all. Having written, however, he should have assured her in the most positive terms that there were no jobs for girls in this country, and that a factory-life was clearly that for which she was best fitted. Then she would have put the idea out of her foolish head.

But he had encouraged her — deliberately; had led her to believe that here was where the future opened before her; had dangled the lure temptingly before her eager eyes!

"A fine mess!" he exclaimed. "I'm in for it! I don't mind paying her way back to Buffalo. And of course I'll pay her for all the time she's losing at the factory.

"It's trying to explain that gets me. And — gee whiz! What'll I do with her to-night? There's no train back before morning!"

But wait! There was a chance. It was close, but not impossible. The late train, the south-bound mail, was of no use. It went no farther than North Bay and made all stops along the line.

But there was a south-bound express that usually went on the siding at Deepwater to let the up-train pass. If he could grab her from the north-bound train, hustle her aboard the south-bound before it pulled out, and make explanations during the whirlwind performance, he might be able to get her off his hands that very evening.

"I'll try it!" he said defiantly. "It's a mean trick, but what else can I do? She'll think I'm crazy, and she'll have a right to. I guess I am."

Larry and the Indian had passed from sight of the island when Stoddard launched his own canoe and began the ten-mile paddle to Deepwater Station.

All the way up the long stretch of the Northeast Arm he struggled with the problem that faced him. At times it seemed that he had it fairly thrown and pinned to the mat, but it always managed to squirm

loose again and the wrestling was resumed. It was elusive to grasp and slippery when he laid hold of it. Now and then he lost his temper during the fray.

But always he came back to the idea that No. 18 must be shipped back — and at once. If there was no time to make things clear to her he could write explanations later. He preferred to send them by mail, anyhow.

Stoddard was conscious that he was planning to evade an issue, a thing for which he had contempt; but he tried to smother his conscience. He was experiencing a curious sense of guilt, and it made him timorous.

He hoped, because of the task that lay ahead of him, that she would prove to be a docile person. If she was bewildered, so much the better; it would be easier to handle her. He had the affair rather carefully planned as he neared the landing at the station.

He knew exactly where the south-bound train would lie on the siding, provided it was on time and would meet the north-bound at Deepwater. There would be no difficulty in picking out No. 18; greenhorns in the woods country were identifiable at a glance. He would seize her by the arm, rush her along the platform, whisk her around the rear end of the train she had left, propel her across the tracks to the panting south-bound express, lift her aboard if she would not climb — and then explain, if there was time. Also, he would give her some money.

"I hate to do it," he said. "It's low-down.

But there's nothing else for it. The girl has simply got to go.

"I thought from her letter she had some sense. But from that telegram I'm sure she's a lunatic."

Leaving his canoe on the float, Stoddard went off at a run for the railway station, a hundred yards distant. There was a quarter of an hour before the north-bound train was due.

"North-bound on time?" he demanded at the ticket-office.

It was five minutes late.

"How about the south-bound? Will it take the siding here?"

"On time; meets 48 here."

Stoddard went out on the platform and mapped his campaign. Events seemed to be propitious. His conscience was accusing him, but although he could not still it he made up his mind sternly to ignore it.

"It's just swapping one surprise for another," he argued. "She certainly astonished me. I imagine that I am going to amaze her. Funny, too, I don't know her name. I suppose she thought I'd understand 'Eighteen' better."

Billy Mason, the station-master, came into view; and Stoddard, busy with his plans, suddenly decided to perfect them.

"Billy!" he called.

"Hello! What brought you back?" inquired Mason.

"Telegram; it was very important," said Stoddard, talking rapidly. "Now listen, Billy. If you

see me do anything that astonishes you when the north-bound train comes in, why, it's all right. There's a mistake been made and I've got to straighten it out in a hurry.

"A lady is coming up on the north-bound. She gets off here. She has to go right back on the south-bound and I've got to get her aboard in a jiffy.

"You see, she doesn't know she's got to go back and she'll probably be surprised. I'll have to explain while I'm rushing her. She may holler a little when she hears the news, but you'll know that it's all right. She'll understand, too, after I tell her all about it.

"But the main thing is to get her on that south-bound. I'm going into the ticket-office to buy a berth for her now, so she'll be fixed all right when she gets aboard."

The idea of getting her a berth occurred to him as he rattled along. Of course it would only be decent of him to get it for her; he would attend to it in a minute.

"So if you see me grab a lady as soon as she steps off the train," Stoddard went on, "everything is O. K. and regular. You understand, Billy?"

"I don't understand," said the station-master, grinning, "but so long's you're doing it, Mr. Stoddard, why, it's all right, as far as I'm concerned. Only you want to be lively with her, because 48 is late and the south-bound'll be pulling out on the jump."

"Oh, I'll hustle," said Stoddard grimly.

He went to the ticket-office and purchased a lower

berth on the south-bound, clear though to Toronto. Then he counted his money and stripped five ten-dollar bills from a roll.

"That ought to give her a good margin," he muttered.

On second thought he returned to the office and bought a railroad ticket, too.

"Might as well do it properly," he told himself.

Placing the money and the two tickets in an envelope, he returned to the platform in time to see the south-bound train enter the siding. If the north-bound carried the usual number of cars conditions would be favorable. He consulted Billy Mason and received the assurance that No. 48 carried her regular equipment.

Presently a long-drawn wail reached his ears. The north-bound was whistling for the station and would show at the bend below in less than a minute. Stoddard hardened his heart and set his jaws.

CHAPTER VII

THROUGH THE RAPIDS

A SHRILL grinding of brakes brought the north-bound train to a halt at Deepwater Station. Stoddard, his pulse throbbing at high speed, stood where he commanded a view of the three day-coaches and the sleeper. The outflow of passengers began.

At first there were only men, campers come for the glories of early September in the big woods. Then two women, evidently a mother and daughter, who were seized in the embraces of a woodsman on the platform. Neither of these was No. 18, Stoddard knew.

Then came three married couples, laden with grips and fishing-rods. They were eliminated. After that more men, struggling with packs and bundles.

Stoddard's eyes roved swiftly from one car to another. Perhaps something had happened and she had not come at all. He did not know whether to be glad or sorry. Over on the siding the south-bound express was getting ready to move. Stoddard's figure was alert and tense with excitement.

Wearily dragging a big grip, there appeared from the last car the figure of a girl. Her burden

bumped behind her, step by step, as she descended. She let go of it with a sigh as it touched the station platform. Stoddard sighted her in an instant, but hesitated.

The girl looked about her, bewildered. Her eyes were searching for somebody. That she was of the city was not debatable; the marks of it were only too clear. Although plainly she expected somebody, not a man on the platform stepped forward or paid the slightest heed to her. She was a stranger.

Stoddard went forward at a run. There was not a second to be lost.

With one hand he seized the grip, with the other he firmly clasped her arm. Whirling her about, he started her at a trot down the platform toward the rear end of the north-bound train.

"There's been a big mistake!" he shouted as he urged her along. "My fault, of course. I'll explain by letter. Sorry. But you'll understand."

Up to this time she had remained speechless. Her feet were running, not because she willed them to do so, but because a giant was propelling her forward with irresistible force.

"But I—"

Stoddard cut off abruptly. He loathed himself for what he was doing, but there was no other way; at least, none so easy. Besides, this girl was never meant for the woods country. He saw that in a glance.

"I know. The blame's mine. You see, there's no chance right now. Mistake for you to have started. Awfully sorry, but you know—"

They had reached the end of the train and the girl, a frightened look in her eyes, tried to escape from his grasp. The south-bound express tooted twice sharply.

"Just time to make it by an eye-lash!" exclaimed Stoddard as he whirled her across the tracks and began racing toward the first passenger-coach of the train on the siding. "Can't you run faster?"

"I — I don't understand!" she gasped. "What's the matter? Let me go!"

"I'll write! No time to talk. There goes the train now!"

The south-bound had released brakes and was moving.

"It's — it's a mistake!"

"You bet!" he shouted. "I'll write. Look sharp now!"

The south-bound was accelerating speed as it slipped out from the siding.

As the first platform of the day-coach neared them Stoddard threw his arm around the girl's waist and lifted her clear of the ground.

"Grab the rail!" he yelled.

Simultaneously he swung her up on the steps. She tripped, turned as she fell, and sat down with a bump on the platform. With another swift motion Stoddard flung the grip beside her. The girl was staring at him with terrified eyes.

"It's all right!" he called as he ran beside the train. "Here!"

Reaching up to her he tossed an envelope into her lap.

"Your ticket, berth, and expenses are in that! Good luck! I'll write."

As the train slid past him and carried her from sight Stoddard could hear her voice crying something, but he did not catch the words.

"She won't dare jump off," he muttered. "Train's going too fast now."

In this conclusion his judgment was excellent. She did not jump. He stood in the middle of the track until the south-bound disappeared; no girl emerged. Turning back to the station platform, he wiped his forehead and shrugged his shoulders.

"Tough, but the only thing to do," he commented. "I'll square it somehow. That girl would never do up here. Poor kid! I'm sorry for her, but it was the kindest thing to do. By getting back quick she probably won't lose her job."

Billy Mason, the station-master, came hurrying along the platform beside the north-bound.

"Conductor of No. 48's looking for you, Stoddard," he said. "Get your party all right?"

"Everything O. K. Where's the conductor?"

"Up forward. Better hurry; they've got all the baggage out."

Stoddard hastened his pace and presently tapped a uniformed official on the shoulder.

"Looking for me? I'm Stoddard."

"Oh!" said the conductor. "Yes, I was looking for you. I had a lady aboard the train, asking for you."

"Yes, yes; I know. I expected her. It's all right."

"But wait. She was ticketed to Deepwater and she wanted to know where to find you. You know Johnny Monday, the Indian? Well, I had him on my train the other night and he mentioned that you were using the Lower Station, being camped somewhere near there."

"I mailed a letter there. What about it?"

"Why," explained the conductor, "she and I figured out that would be where you'd meet her, so —"

"What?" exclaimed Stoddard hoarsely, as the conductor paused to hold up two fingers at the engineer.

"She got off at Lower Station. She's there now."

Stoddard said nothing. He merely stood and stared. He was still staring when the conductor swung himself aboard the moving north-bound.

More than a minute elapsed before Stoddard stirred. Then he turned slowly and walked down the platform. Presently he paused and began talking to himself.

"She's at the Lower Station! She's there now! Then who — Oh, Lord!"

He walked on again mechanically. He passed Billy Mason and several loungers on the platform, but did not appear to see them.

"What have I done now?" he moaned. "Who was that girl? What 'll she think? Why, it's impossible! It just can't be! I'm dreaming!"

On the way to the canoe-landing two breathless men passed him.

"We'll have to explain what delayed us," said one as they hurried by. "But she won't mind. We've only kept her waiting a few minutes."

"She'll be worried just the same," answered the other. "It's her first trip up and I'll bet she was scared when she didn't see a soul that she knew at the station."

"Oh, well! So long as she's there —"

Stoddard lost the rest of it. He was not anxious to overhear more. He began running toward his canoe. He must escape! He bumped into people who crowded the landing, elbowing his way through the press. Some of them turned to protest, saw a big, stern-looking man in a hurry, and said nothing.

Throwing his canoe into the water with a single jerk, Stoddard flung himself into it and seized a paddle. Already it seemed as if they must be starting in pursuit, those two men who were late to meet the train. He wondered if Billy Mason would tell.

Not until he was nearly half a mile from the landing did he remember No. 18. Then he stopped paddling abruptly.

"Great Scott! I forgot!" he exclaimed.

No. 18 was at the Lower Station waiting. It was already dusk. She was miles from anybody, all by herself in the big woods that she wanted so much to see.

"She'll probably be dead from fright when I get there, but I've got to go. Let's see now."

Stoddard thought rapidly. To paddle clear around to the Lower Station was more than twenty miles, unless he took the portage across the neck of

the peninsula, and he had no mind to try that again after dark. At any rate, it was over ten miles to the portage. The Lower Station was six miles by rail from the upper one. He could walk it in an hour and a half, even on the ties, but then he would have no means of getting No. 18 anywhere after his arrival.

There was one other way. He could go directly ashore from where he was, strike the railway, carrying his canoe with him, and follow the track for a mile and a half, after which he could put in at Spruce River. This was a stream that touched the railway at that point and followed it rather irregularly for several miles — a sufficient distance to carry him to the Lower Station. The journey was a matter of two hours, probably, but it would find him with a canoe at the end of it.

Without delay Stoddard adopted this route. It was a brief run to the southern shore of the North-east Arm and but a short climb to the railway line.

Once there, he settled the canoe comfortably on his shoulders and started off at a dog-trot. So long as he could see his footing he was resolved to make good time.

Carrying a canoe was a sort of second nature to Stoddard. Where the going was clear his burden was never on his mind. Seventy pounds was not a sufficient weight to obtrude itself upon his thoughts, for Stoddard was not only powerful, but seasoned. He had the strength to do things, and he practically doubled that by knowing how.

So, as his hobnails clattered along the wooden ties

and the broken rock that ballasted the road-bed, he had uninterrupted leisure to consider the case of No. 18 — and his own. He would have liked to consider the case of the girl on the south-bound train, if there were any way of doing so in a coherent manner. Although it hovered constantly in the background of his mind, he abandoned all efforts to reduce it to sanity. His reason seemed to totter whenever he laid hold of it.

Besides, the girl on the south-bound was no longer in the picture. She had been ruthlessly erased at a single stroke. It was the girl at the Lower Station who needed attention now.

It would be pitch dark for more than an hour before he reached her. He wondered what form of treatment was applied in cases of hysterics. He was pretty good on cuts, bruises, and primitive surgery, but he had had no experience with ailments of the feminine nervous system.

He hoped she would have sense enough not to move from the lonely little platform. A few yards in any direction would be sufficient to lose her in the woods. And what would she think of him? That disturbed Stoddard more than anything else.

No; there was one other matter even more troublesome. What would he do with her? No friendly south-bound train would come to his rescue now! No. 18 was at Deepwater for the night, if nothing more.

She would have to sleep somewhere, if hysterics permitted. There was a hotel at the station, but that would be a six-mile walk back. And perhaps

she had a trunk! There was also the hotel on Deep-water Island.

Stoddard settled upon that. It was not a long trip; he could put her up there and decide what next to do in the morning. To take her to camp was out of the question. Larry Livingston, his camp-mate, must never hear of this affair.

It was dark when he reached the spot where Spruce River curved in toward the railway, and now he left the tracks and scrambled down a steep embankment, balancing the canoe carefully as he felt for solid footing. It was a short but rough journey to reach the stream, and when Stoddard at last stood upon its banks he was panting and perspiring. The night was warm, the air sluggish and heavy. Yet it was so clear overhead that the gently flowing waters of Spruce River mirrored the stars.

The stream swept away from the railway line again, running through a densely timbered little valley. As a river, it was entitled to no more than a hair-line on the map, yet a very kinky line. It doubled upon itself, wandered aimlessly hither and thither, and was in no haste, save for occasional bursts of speed in rapids, to reach any destination whatever.

Stoddard knew it pretty well. There were marshes along its banks, where the moose came in the dawn-hours and at dusk. More than once he had drifted through noiselessly, just to surprise some thirsty bull or a cow with her calf.

But now the river was in complete gloom, and in spots where the trees met overhead he could not

even glimpse the sky. He did not, however, trust wholly to the current, but plied his paddle constantly, for every minute that slipped by signified to his vivid imagination just so much more hysterics at the Lower Station.

The countless bends served to keep him alert to his task, so that his craft would not jam her nose into the bank in an endeavor to take short cuts. Fallen trees and sunken ones had to be watched for. Twice he found it necessary to climb out on logs and haul the canoe across. Spruce River was tortuous and tantalizing by day; after nightfall it was transformed into a bewildering maze.

Stoddard took only one dangerous chance. There were some two hundred yards of swift water, ending almost opposite the Lower Station. To haul out and carry meant toil. Nobody had ever bothered to cut a portage, for the rapids could be run easily enough by day, while at night Spruce River rarely figured in the travels of the North woods people.

It was several seasons since he had viewed this stretch of white water, yet he trusted to his memory of the rocks and shoal places. The river-stage was low, but even then the passage could be made, with skill and some good luck. It was worth trying, at any rate.

As the black water beneath him began to flow more swiftly, eager for the scuffle that would turn it into snowy foam, Stoddard caught the steady, droning sound of the combat that was being waged ahead. Bracing his knees securely, he drew the

extra paddle within quick reach of his hand, where it could be snatched into instant action in case of mishap to the one he wielded, and then increased the cadence of his own strokes.

The rapid began just below a sharp turn, where the water banked itself for the final plunge. The canoe swept around the curve at racing speed — Stoddard was at grips with his task!

One thing favored, at any rate. He could see something. The white water that boiled about him sprang into sharp relief against the dark banks that confined it. Rocks that cleft the surface he could pick out with ease. Those that lay hidden a hand's breadth below must be guessed at. They were part of the game.

The men of the outdoors learn rapids by running them. The channel through every stretch of white water is mapped, not by survey and sounding, but by adventure and combat. The way to find where it lies is to get into it.

The first trip is the real adventure; those that follow are mere toil, guided by experience. In the woods-people this business of riding foam-crests breeds instinct; almost mechanically they seek and find the path of least resistance.

So it was with Stoddard. He was running his course now, partly from memory, partly by intuition. Even the varying notes that were struck by the leaping water had a meaning that he could interpret. The feel of the stream against his swiftly flying paddle carried a significance, too.

Spray dashed into his face, but he shook his head

and laughed. The spirit of conquest was in his blood. Skill still rode with him in the plunging canoe, but caution had taken wings. It was not a moment for prudence and deliberation, but one for swift and dashing attack.

A roaring "S"-turn, where the water was rent with black bowlders, snatched at the canoe and hurled it forward, yawing and swaying, diving and rearing, now careening, now righting itself, but always racing at dizzy speed. Centaurlike, Stoddard rode his steed as if it were a part of him. From side to side his paddle shifted, his body swinging as a counterbalance to the thrust of the water.

The turn was passed and the canoe shot out upon a long, straight slide that seemed in the faint light like a hillside covered with whirling snow. There were rocks here, too, as he well remembered; but even the low water did not uncover their heads.

Three times the canoe scraped, once hanging poised for an instant, while the water piled up astern and threatened to swamp it. Stoddard flung himself forward, and the shift of his weight set the craft free again, to fly onward along the slope.

One more twist and the white water would cool its frenzy in the broad, deep pools below. Stoddard shouted aloud in triumph as, with a final and herculean dip of the paddle, his light craft slid at torpedo speed out into the quiet water.

"That was worth while!" he cried.

"Grand!" exclaimed a voice from the darkness.

He doubted his ears, for there was something

weird in the sound that assailed them with such amazing abruptness.

"Hello, there!" he shouted, staring ahead of him and rising to his knees.

"Hello," answered the voice.

He was close to the shore at the farther edge of the basin into which the rapid poured its froth, but beyond a black mass of trees he could see nothing.

"What the devil!" he burst out. "Who is it?"

"Me."

"Me?"

"Sadie."

"Sadie?"

"No. 18."

"Well, I'll —"

"I guess you're Mr. Stoddard, ain't you?" continued the voice.

"Of course; certainly. But I — I —"

"Wasn't expectin' me down here. I wasn't expectin' you, neither. That is, not down here."

"I should say not," he answered, as he drove the canoe ashore. "Where are you?"

"Right here." And the stirring of a figure against the somber woods located the source of the voice.

"You might have got lost," he said severely.

"No; I was careful. I could hear the water runnin' somewhere from up there on the platform. After a while I follered the sound, 'cause there wasn't anything to do back up there by the track except sit and look at the stars.

"So I found this place, and I've been sittin' here

ever since, watchin' that water come down. There's an awful pile of it, ain't there?

"Then I saw you comin' around that corner up there. My, but it was grand! I guessed it was you, too."

Stoddard had stepped close to the dark figure, but the dim light helped him little in his scrutiny. He reached down and picked up his canoe.

"Lead the way up to the station platform," he commanded. "I want to get a look at you."

"Sure," said Sadie. "And when you get about half-way up, look out. There's a tree that's fell down, and I'd like to have broke my neck tumblin' over it."

CHAPTER VIII

SADIE ARRIVES

THE light at the lower station was dim, yet, after the gloom of the woods just below, it seemed to blaze forth like the night glare of Broadway. Stoddard, following at the heels of Sadie, was making haste to reach it. He was suddenly impatient to inspect the girl, who plowed her way quite steadily through a tangle of brush.

His mind already had made some quick revisions. Although he had but unsatisfactory glimpses of the figure that occasionally moved between him and the light that was their goal, he knew that she was no flat-chested slip of a creature, wan with the grind of factory toil. That picture had vanished even when she spoke.

So did the problem of hysterics that he had steeled himself to meet. He was relieved, yet disconcerted, by this abrupt shattering of expectations.

When he finally dropped his burden on the little platform, Stoddard turned to find her standing near the light. He drew a sharp breath and his eyes widened. He saw — well, he saw Sadie.

The revelation held him speechless. He stood and stared, his hands on his hips, his head bent forward, his forehead furrowed with a frown of incredulity.

Stoddard's scrutiny of Sadie was no franker than her own of him, but infinitely more surprised. In fact, Sadie did not appear to be in the least astonished. Her glance roved slowly from his eyes down to his hunting-boots, then back again; and she nodded unconsciously while she conducted the survey, as if her imagination had been confirmed in minute detail. It was evident that she was satisfied with something. At last her survey came to a rest on the olive-drab shirt.

"You sure are a forty-four," she commented.

"Say, explain that," said Stoddard. "What's this forty-four business?"

"Why, chest."

"But what — Oh, I understand. You mean it's a forty-four shirt. I never thought of that."

"You thought it meant six-shooters," she laughed. "And I never thought of *that*."

"I got the idea from your mentioning cowboys," explained Stoddard.

Sadie laughed again, this time with a hint of embarrassment.

"Tell me something straight," she said. "Did that stuff I wrote read silly? I didn't mean it to."

"Not a bit! It was absolutely all right. I got the idea right away."

"That's good," she said with a nod. "I was pretty sure you did."

He was studying her face with ever-growing astonishment, and now, with quick glances, he appraised the stalwart figure that faced him.

"You look as though you were entitled to something more than a number," said Stoddard.

"I'd have put my name on the telegram, but I knew you'd understand the number better. I'm Sadie Hicks. I come from Ohio."

"I guess the name would have puzzled me, Miss Hicks."

"Make it Sadie," she said simply. "I'm used to that — and the number. I'll be forgettin' to answer if you say Hicks."

"Then we'll make it Sadie."

Somehow the conversation did not betake itself to essentials, although there was such a great deal to explain.

"Sorry I was late," he remarked, as he fumbled for his pipe and tobacco-pouch.

"Oh, that's all right. I ain't been hurt none."

Stoddard winced, but she did not appear to notice it.

"Did I do wrong to get off at this station?" she asked.

"Well, it's not the regular one. I'd have thought you hadn't come at all if it wasn't for the fact that the conductor told me where you were."

"He said I'd better get off here," she explained, "and I took his word for it. He said some Injian told him you was usin' this station. But I suppose Injians lie an awful lot; I heard they did."

"The Indian told the truth as far as he knew it," said Stoddard, smiling. "It took me nearly two hours to get here. Were you scared?"

As the question left his lips he knew it was idle.

"No; I wasn't scared. I felt kinda strange, but I don't think I was scared. It was a little creepy for a while, after it got dark and terrible quiet. But I suppose I'll get used not to hearin' trolleys.

"I never seen so many stars," she added with an upward glance. "I sat and watched 'em for a good while. Down in Buffalo we don't see near so many. I suppose these are just the same stars up here; that is, the main ones, but they look different somehow — bigger and shinier. Then there's whole bunches that I never noticed in the city at all.

"While I was lookin' at stars I heard water runnin', and I wanted to see if it was anything like Niagara. I've been there twice. Of course, it ain't; I might have known. But it's good to look at just the same."

"You don't want to start wandering at night up here," chided Stoddard; "not until you know something about the country. People who do that get lost."

"All right; I won't," she promised. "I thought about gettin' lost, but I knew I couldn't get lost very far at night, and I can holler good and loud, so you could have follered the sound when you came along. But I just had to see that water."

"You'll see water enough when you've been up here a while," he remarked.

Just why this perfunctory observation slipped from him Stoddard did not know, for his mind instantly flashed back to plain facts. It was not likely she would see much water, or woods, either, for that

matter. She would have to go back to Buffalo, and promptly; he had no job for her.

It was a pity, too; as he looked at her, still with increasing wonder, he knew that it was a crime to sentence such a being to the four walls of a factory. It was like taking some one of the woods creatures and putting it in a zoo.

There was a pause in the conversation. It was Sadie who broke it.

"You'll think it's kinda silly," she said with a laugh, "but I was wonderin' all the way up on the train what became of all the snow."

"The snow!"

"Uh-huh. Go on and laugh; I don't mind."

"Why, summer's not over yet, even if it is September!"

"I get that now," confessed Sadie good-naturedly. "After I saw how things really were I felt as foolish as a spring hat. You see, Canada's a new one on me. I had an idea there was lots of snow up here, and ice, 'most all the time; so I come prepared. I woke up, after ridin' on the train a while, when I found things kept stayin' green no matter how far we got. Why, it ain't hardly any colder here than it is down home — I mean Buffalo."

"It's not cold enough to-night," said Stoddard, glancing at the sky. The unusual warmth of the air was a presage of "weather," he thought.

"It certainly ain't cold enough for some of the stuff I brought," she observed philosophically, as she nodded toward a dark object a few feet distant.

Stoddard stepped forward and made a casual ex-

amination of Sadie's baggage. A shiny new suitcase — the first she had ever owned — stood on the platform. Thrown across it were an ulster, a sweater, and a pair of rubbers, tied together with a string. From a pocket in the ulster protruded woolen mittens. He smiled.

"The sweater's all right," he said hastily, as he caught Sadie's eye.

"Go on and get that laugh out of your system, Mr. Stoddard," she urged. "I've had mine. You don't have to hold it in on my account. I'm not touchy when I'm really the goat. I'm glad the sweater's some good, anyhow. As for the rest of the outfit, I spent real money for it, and I might as well have took it to Florida."

Stoddard did laugh. Also, he winced again. He did not expect from Sadie that precision of speech that constantly guarded the conversation of his Fifth Avenue friends, Kitty Fitch and Estelle Wallace, yet he was not accustomed to the shock of factory English, at least from the lips of a goddess.

"And that's what she is," he muttered under his breath. "Man alive, look at her! And from a city factory! Something's wrong somewhere."

Sadie was examining the canoe with curiosity. Finally she laid hold of the gunwale with her hands.

"Why, I can lift it!" she exclaimed in pleased wonder as she suited the action to her words.

"You look as if you could lift two," said Stoddard, watching her.

"I *am* big," she admitted. "I'm strong, too. Just natural with me, somehow. I didn't get it

packin' shirts. I always felt like I was too big for that place back there.

"Whenever I got near some of them little girls like No. 12 I had to move careful for fear I'd happen to hit 'em by accident and break 'em. But I ought to manage all right up here."

She drew a deep breath of the night air, her bosom swelling magnificently under the plain blue suit she wore.

"What you said about that air — that you could bite it — is right," she added. "I feel as if I'd started to grow again. And yet when I take a look at things round here I don't feel as big as I did back in the city. I guess it's because there's plenty of room. You can use some room yourself, can't you?"

"A little," he admitted.

"I guess I'll fit in all right," she mused in a satisfied tone.

Stoddard started to say something, then bit his lip and checked the words. How could he tell her? What in the world she would do in a semi-wilderness he did not know. He had no job for her. Yet he shrank from brutally destroying her dream, which to Sadie had now become a reality.

She had found her outdoors. Already she loved it. It was *her* place, sprung from a vision at last and become a tangible, living thing. Here she would live; here she would work; here she had come to stay. To get a job, of course, would be easy; the big man would look out for that. He had said there ought to be plenty of them. She was eager

to get to work; she was young and strong, and she knew she would be happy in her outdoors.

"Something told me I was makin' the right move," she thought, her lips framing the words. "You can bank on a forty-four."

Stoddard was reading accurately what was in her mind, and it was this that halted his speech. He had no heart for telling her the truth; he could not bring himself to the point of slaying her simple and wholesome faith. What could he do?

Sadie's mind was running, still running placidly in the same channel of contentment, strong in the assurance that she was truly born for this new life.

"I can do 'most any kind of work after a little practice, I guess," she said. "I've got the strength, you see. There's a whole lot of the girls back down in Buffalo who couldn't stand it. The main thing is to find out what you can stand, I suppose, and then go to it."

"That's good philosophy," he commented.

"Is it? I don't know much about philosophy, but that's the way it always seemed to me. And when you don't fit in, why, the best game is to back out quick. Speakin' of that, I never saw a woman back out so quick as I did to-day. I've been puzzlin' over it ever since. I didn't know she had sense enough."

Stoddard waited for her to go on.

"I met her comin' up on the train," explained Sadie. "She was alone and I was alone, and we got to talkin'. She was different from me; she was an educated lady. She was goin' to Deepwater, too

— up to the other station. Her brother and husband are campin' there, she told me. And all the while she was talkin' about goin' to live in that camp I kept wonderin' how she was goin' to stand it.

"She was a slight little thing and seemed kinda timid about it. Said she hadn't ever been up here before, but her husband told her it would do her a lot of good. Of course, I hadn't been up here either, but I felt like a regular old-timer alongside of her. She said if she didn't like it she wouldn't stay here long — and she didn't!"

Sadie stopped to laugh.

"Go on!" commanded Stoddard in a queer voice.

"Well, I got off here, of course," she continued, still chuckling, "and we said good-by, and she went on up to the regular station. After I'd been here a little while I heard another train comin'. Pretty soon it went by, goin' in the other direction. And what do you guess?"

"I'm not guessing. Go on," he said grimly.

"Well, Mr. Stoddard, there was that lady sittin' on the platform of one of the cars. She was sittin' there like she was dreamin'. She was holdin' on to her grip with one arm and she was starin' at a piece of paper in her hand.

"I was so surprised I just let a yell out. She looked up at me, all startled like, and opened her mouth. I don't know whether she said anything; I couldn't hear it. It was all in a second, anyhow. Then she was gone."

Sadie paused and shook her head slowly.

"It certainly beat me," she added. "I oughtn't

to laugh, maybe, but I can't help it. That was the quickest mind-changin' act I ever knew.

"But I guess she had the right dope, after all. She wasn't cut out for this place and must 've found it out in a hurry. Don't you guess that was it?"

Stoddard swallowed a few times and bit viciously on the stem of his pipe.

"It's evident she made a change in her plans," he said shortly. "Sometimes they do."

"And I never thought she had that much sense, either," commented Sadie. "It's all right to change your mind if you have to; but hers wasn't ever made up. I'd feel awful foolish if anything like that ever happened to me."

Stoddard merely nodded. He knew that such a thing would never happen to Sadie. He doubted if it would even have been attempted had the real No. 18 alighted from the train at Deepwater Station. The woman on the south-bound was easy to handle; she was little and pathetically bewildered. But this one!

"What do you work at, Mr. Stoddard?" asked Sadie suddenly.

"I'm an engineer."

"You don't look it," she said in a surprised tone. "Locomotive or stationary?"

"Neither," he answered, with a faint smile. "A civil engineer."

"Meanin' —"

"Building bridges, laying railroads, and that sort of work."

"Oh, I see," said Sadie slowly. "That's diff'rent. That's an outdoors job."

"Yes, mostly."

"I couldn't figure you runnin' an engine, somehow. You go wherever they happen to be buildin' a railroad?"

"That's about it."

"You mean anywhere? All over?" asked Sadie, her eyes widening.

"Anywhere the job may be."

"In foreign countries?" she persisted, her voice incredulous.

"Sometimes."

A long sigh escaped from Sadie's lips.

"Gee, but that must be elegant," she whispered in a tone of awe — "just to go everywhere — outdoors!"

"You're rather strong for outdoors," he said, watching the play of her vivid imagination on her face. "How did you come to get the idea?"

"I don't know," said Sadie, shaking her head. "It sort of grew in me. Of course, I was farm-raised; but that didn't count — not like this."

Her arm swept in a broad gesture toward the woods across the track, beyond which the white water of Spruce River was voicing its eternal song.

"I *just knew* I'd have to get outdoors some time. I guess I can't explain it. I can't get at the words, somehow. But I *felt* it. And when you feel things you know 'em better than any other way. I do, anyhow."

Sadie paused and gravely inspected the man who stood in front of her.

"I don't have to explain it to you," she added in a contented voice. "You understand it even better'n I do. You feel it, too. I could tell when you wrote, and it wasn't so much what you said, neither. It was just there, in the letter, and it didn't need no words."

Stoddard looked at her with a sense of many confusing impressions. In some things she seemed but a child; yet when he tried to study the child he found in its place a woman. More bewildering still — a woman of a kind utterly new — at least to him.

Her speech irritated him; Kitty and Estelle did not talk like this. Yet he found himself listening with a curious eagerness, for through all the unfamiliar mixture of slang and stumbling etymology ran a note that was strong and deep and true. The thought was there, even if the words served it poorly.

Always, to Stoddard, speech of this kind had spelled ignorance. Was this woman ignorant? Strangely, he found himself drifting to the conclusion that she was very wise.

Was she simple? He had a persistent notion that there were some strange complexities in her nature.

Was she shallow? He answered that readily — no. Already he had glimpsed depths that astonished him.

She interrupted his reflections abruptly.

"When do I get to work? To-morrow?" she asked.

"Why, I'd —"

Stoddard halted lamely. This was the topic he had been dreading.

"Maybe you haven't had time to locate a job for me," said Sadie readily. "I did come kinda sudden. But that's all right. I can hold out a few days."

"You're sure you want to give up factory-work?" he ventured.

"Why, I've *given* it up!" she exclaimed. "I was fired; the Shrimp done it — God bless him! I wouldn't have said that a couple of days back, but after lookin' at things up here I can say it without lyin'. I'm through with fact'ries, thank Heaven! It was bein' fired that started me off so sudden. Otherwise I'd have wrote."

"I see," he answered cautiously. "Well, the truth is, I haven't got that job located yet. I wasn't expecting you so soon."

"I get you," she nodded. "That'll be all right. I can look round a bit myself, too. Between the two of us, we ought to land something."

Stoddard's conscience gave him a sharp twinge. This frank confidence in him was unmerited; her serene optimism shamed him. He would have to do something now. Suppose she discovered what he had planned to do; what he really had done, in fact? Not if he could help it would she ever know why the woman on the south-bound train changed her mind with such startling swiftness.

Meantime the matter of finding shelter for Sadie was the immediate business in hand. He glanced at his watch. It was nine thirty.

"Well, we've got to get a lodging for you," he said.

"Sure," she assented. "Where is the boardin'-house?"

"There isn't any boarding-house right here," he explained. "There's a sort of one up at the other station, but we don't want to walk six miles along the track. I was planning to put you up at the hotel on Deepwater Island. It's easier to get there."

"Hotel?" murmured Sadie. "Why, just as you say. Is it a swell place?"

"I wouldn't call it that. It's filled with city people."

"Just spendin' the summer?"

He nodded.

"Well, lead me to it," said Sadie with resignation. "I don't know what kind of a figure I'll cut in a swell hotel, but I guess they can stand it for one night."

"Don't you worry," he said.

"I won't. I'll let them. How much 'll it cost, Mr. Stoddard?"

"We won't bother about that now. I'll take care of that, anyhow."

"No," said Sadie firmly. "Much obliged, but I got to pay my own way, Mr. Stoddard."

"Of course," he said hastily. "What I meant was, if it should happen to pinch you a little, why, I could advance you whatever you needed until —"

"Until I get to workin'," she interrupted with a nod. "I'm obliged for that, too. But I ain't goin' to do it if there's any way to help it, Mr. Stoddard. I got some money; I drawed out all I had in the bank. I never borrowed any money yet from nobody, and I ain't goin' to start now. At least I ain't beginnin' till I've kissed my last iron man good-by."

"All right, Sadie, but when the last iron man goes I'll expect you to let me know."

"Well, maybe — if I ain't got a job by then. But that won't happen. I'll get a job!"

"Of course."

"Now, which way to the Waldorf?" she asked briskly.

"It's mostly by water; we take the canoe," he answered.

"This thing?" asked Sadie, touching it with her foot. "The one you came shootin' down that waterfall in? Why, I was wonderin' how it was big enough for you, leavin' alone me. I'm some size, Mr. Stoddard. Sure there'll be room? With that baggage, too?"

"Lots," he assented, laughing. "Just because you can lift it don't despise it. It'll carry three or four of you."

Sadie looked at it doubtfully; then her face cleared.

"If you say it'll carry me, why, it will," she said. "I oughta know that without arguin'. Are you goin' to run me down a waterfall in it?"

"Why? Would you like to try it?"

"I wouldn't mind. It looked excitin'."

"Well, not this time. We just have smooth sailing on the lake. That's in the other direction."

As Stoddard spoke he looked overhead, and something roused him to action. Sadie followed his glance.

"Not so many stars," she commented.

"No. We'll get right along, if you don't mind. It may rain."

He feared more than rain, however. The look of the sky and the feel of the air did not reassure him.

Shouldering the canoe and balancing it with one hand, Stoddard reached down and picked up Sadie's grip.

"Here, lemme have that!" she exclaimed. "You got enough to carry."

"You take your coat and sweater and follow me," he commanded. "I'm doing this."

"Yes, sir," said Sadie meekly.

She was as close to his heels as the canoe would permit when the short path from the station platform led them to the rickety wharf at the edge of the lake. Sadie stood staring out at the dark water, while Stoddard busied himself loading her traps into the boat. The bigness and the stillness of it struck to her very soul. She felt her pulse quicken and drew her breath deeper and more sharply. Something thrilled her softly.

"All ready," he said, kneeling beside the floating canoe to steady it.

Sadie paused before stepping in.

"Say!" she declared abruptly. "We haven't shook hands yet. Can't we?"

"We surely can," said Stoddard, rising to his feet.

It was no timid, flaccid hand that he found in his. It was warm and firm and strong. It was not slim and fragile, like Estelle's, nor roly-poly and velvety, like Kitty's. It was a real hand, with a real woman behind it.

"Now we can go ahead," said Sadie, as Stoddard slowly released her fingers. "Where do I sit?"

He held the canoe firmly while she placed herself where he directed; then, with a final swift look at the sky, he stepped in and pushed out into the lake.

CHAPTER IX

SHIPWRECK

MOST of the stars were hidden as they set off across Island Bay at a rapid pace, only those that Sadie described as "the main ones" still showing faintly through a thickening haze overhead. The air was lifeless, but to Stoddard's trained senses it hinted at a sudden awakening. He expected wind with the rain.

Sadie was not weather-wise in the north country, so her own mind was untroubled by any shadow of anxiety as the canoe shot swiftly over the dark water. Even in the darkness her eyes lacked no objects to dwell upon. The shores that diverged on either hand were lofty and wooded save for one jutting cape, where a spear of rock lifted itself high above the lake, as if poised for a plunge into the quiet depths.

Ahead lay the rounded knob of the peninsula, while scattered in the foreground were the scores of little islands that gave the bay its name. The outlines of these things she could discern, while her imagination filled in the picture.

No sound save the rhythmical rise and fall of the paddle and the drip of the water from its blade came to her ears. The silence for a long time seemed to lay a finger upon her lips, as if it were a sacrilege

to speak. She lay back against the forward thwart, her coat serving as a cushion, and opened her soul to the mysteries of Deepwater.

A dreamy contentment filled her. It was good and wonderful to look at, this big outdoors, even when the curtain of night had descended. Yet, though she marveled, she felt that she was not surprised. Something had whispered to her that it would be like this. Now it seemed that every one of her senses was carrying the same message — "It's true, just as you saw it in the vision."

The route to the hotel occupied Stoddard's attention to the exclusion of all else. He knew it well enough, but he did not want to lose a yard of distance by wandering carelessly from the course. Often he looked upward and, following each glance, he spurted a few strokes. Even the "main stars" were invisible now.

He skirted close to the shore on his left hand and began bearing away from the islands after the canoe had rounded a point. Sadie had been watching the black spots grow steadily larger as they approached, and now that she saw they would come no nearer she sighed gently.

"It looks nice over there," she commented in a whisper, waving her arm toward the islands.

"They're off our course, however," he answered. "Some day you may have a chance to see them."

"I'd like to own one," she said wistfully.

"For what?"

"Oh, just to live on, I guess. But I suppose there's no jobs there."

"Not unless you built a hotel and opened up for business," he laughed.

"Oh, I wouldn't do that!" she exclaimed. "Not even if I had the coin. I'd want it all to myself. It 'd be just like I owned a separate country and was the boss of the whole thing. That's a foolish idea, maybe. But I'd be awful selfish with that island for a while."

"The Woman Hermit of the Deepwater," he observed lightly.

"That's the idea!" she exclaimed. "You see, I ain't ever had a chance to do any hermiting, except in a hall bedroom, and it ain't much fun there. You've got to do it all in your mind and keep your eyes shut, 'cause every time you open 'em the chrysanthe'ums on the wall-paper keeps remindin' you that you ain't really a hermit at all.

"Then, maybe, when you've got your eyes shut and you're away off somewheres by yourself, you hear the supper-bell ringin' or some kid bawlin' out a baseball extra, and the bet's off again. That's why I'd like to have one good try at it."

"You'd soon find it lonesome."

"Maybe. But say, Mr. Stoddard, was you ever lonesome in a boardin'-house?"

"Can't say I was."

"Then you ain't been lonesome at all," she declared. "That's the blow-in-the-bottle stuff when it comes to lonesomeness — a boardin'-house. I read a book about a girl who was lonesome like that. It was true enough, but I got sort of mad at

her, too. She used to sit and cry over it and get sad."

"And didn't you?"

"Do I look as if I'd ever spent much time weepin' into a lace handkerchief? Some of 'em do, I know; but not me. What's the use? It don't get you nothing but a red nose. That's why I got sore on the girl in the book. She was always dabbin' at her eyes and snufflin' and sayin' how cruel the world was.

"No, sir, Mr. Stoddard! When I got the lonesome habit I used to go out and hunt up something to laugh at, or else shut my eyes and go hermiting."

"And would it always work?"

"I can't remember when it didn't. Of course, it's like kiddin' yourself, in a way. But there's worse things than that."

"You ought to write a D. O. after your name, Sadie."

"What's that?"

"It's a degree I've just invented — Doctor of Optimism."

"Opti — What?"

"Optimism. It means always looking on the bright side, even if your luck runs bad."

"That's a good word," she said soberly. "I'm goin' to learn that one. Op-ti-mism. That gets it all in one package. I don't know much about those kind of words, but I won't forget that."

He heard her repeating it softly to herself several

times, emphasizing each syllable. It rather astonished him that he had no impulse to laugh.

The way to the Deepwater Hotel from the lower station is all water, if you choose to take it thus; but, like every other journey in this woods country, it has its short cut as well. Stoddard felt that he was pressed for time, and decided on the portage. It was a very short one — less than two hundred yards — and would save nearly two miles of paddling around into the South Arm, where Deepwater Island lay.

When he beached the canoe at the beginning of the carry Sadie exclaimed in a tone of regret:

"Are we there already?"

"Not to the hotel. There'll be more paddling in a few minutes. We are just taking a short cut across country."

"I wasn't tired," she said as she stepped ashore.

"I know. But I'm afraid it's going to rain some, and there's no need to get wet if we can help it."

"Don't fret about me if we do get caught," remarked Sadie as she watched him haul the canoe out. "I never did carry a umbrella."

Sadie insisted on taking her grip across the portage. To avoid time lost in argument, Stoddard let her have her way. It was very dark where the path ran under the trees, so he made her hold fast to the end of the canoe, as a guide to her footsteps.

Once she let go abruptly, and he heard a scuffling behind him, followed by a crash.

"Anything wrong?" he asked, halting.

"Ain't I the clumsy thing!" exclaimed a voice

from the gloom. "My nose got to itchin', and I didn't dare let go the boat 'cause you told me not to, so I tried to scratch it with my other hand and dropped my bag, and then fell over it. The bag, I mean."

"Hurt?"

"No!" she answered scornfully.

"Pass me the grip."

"Nothin' doin', Mr. Stoddard. I'll carry that grip or die fallin' over it. Where is the blame thing? All right; I got it. Now wait till I get hold of the boat again.

"Ouch! I found it with my nose. It won't need scratchin' no more. Now go ahead."

Stoddard pushed on, moving at a pace that Sadie could follow. Once she stumbled again — this time over a root.

"Don't they ever lay a sidewalk here?" she asked as she recovered herself.

"Not out this way," he laughed. "Are you anxious for pavements again?"

"No-o; I suppose I oughtn't to have said that. But I ain't anxious to get my new suit all tore, either, and I guess I did that time. It's these stingy skirts we're all wearin' now," she added, naïvely speaking for her sex. "Some fashions are awful tryin'."

"Some of the women who come up here don't bother with skirts at all," he informed her.

"You mean they just wear — pants?"

"That's it; pants."

He could hear her chuckling behind him.

"What do they look like?" she asked.

"They look all right. It's sensible."

"They don't wear 'em around the hotel, do they?"

"No; they put skirts on there. I mean out in camp."

"Oh! Well, maybe it's all right. But I can't help laughin'. I'm thinkin' how some that I know 'd look. No. 12, for instance. Why, she wouldn't be nothin' but a little boy! Pants, eh? I'll bet they look funny!"

An instant later:

"Holy smoke! There I go again! Something tore, too. Pants! Well, I'm no suffragette, but I wished I had a pair now!"

When Stoddard dropped the canoe into the water at the other end of the portage he pointed across the broad sweep of the South Arm to a group of faintly twinkling lights.

"There's the hotel," he said.

"How far?"

"It's close to three miles. It's on an island."

Sadie began an examination of her skirt that confirmed her worst suspicions.

"It's got two slits instead of one, now," she announced. "That ought to make it twice as swell, hadn't it? It's easier to walk in, anyhow. Here's the grip. Do I sit in the same place?"

The hotel lay diagonally across this arm of Deepwater, and as Stoddard laid the course for it he cast anxious glances skyward and behind. The prospect did not please him. The South Arm is wide and open near the upper end, its surface unbroken with

islands for several miles. That on which the hotel stands is the first of an irregular chain that stretches off southward. Winds sweep unchecked, and no obstacle offers itself to the rush of the seas they carry before them.

A few drops of rain fell. Stoddard bent to his paddle, throwing into each thrust all the energy of his sinewy back and shoulders.

"Better put on that ulster," he advised. "It's going to rain some." Sadie drew the garment about her shoulders.

A few minutes later he felt a quick puff of warm wind on his cheek; then the air was still again; then another puff. The rain was becoming steady; it fell in heavier volume. The wind was not far off now.

"We're going to get wet. Can you stand that?" he called.

"Nothin' on me 'll run," she answered cheerfully.

Now came a sharp blast of wind that did not entirely die away, but played fitfully on the surface of the water, uncertain as to direction and even hesitant as to pace. First it dashed the rain into the back of his neck; then, with a bewildering shift, sent it beating into his eyes. Stoddard bent his head and laid himself to his work.

Glancing up at brief intervals, he could still see the lights of the hotel, but they were becoming dimmer each time. The rain had overtaken the canoe from the rear; he knew that when it had advanced a little farther beyond them it would blot out completely the beacon that was guiding him.

The wind was picking up rapidly and steadying itself. In a few minutes there would be a sea. Stoddard gritted his teeth. He knew he should not have taken the chance. Alone, the risk would not have given him concern. He had taken a light canoe through more than this stretch of storm-lashed water and been none the worse for it.

But the girl was so much dead weight. She could not even paddle. There was no turning back to the shore they had left; there was nothing to do but drive ahead.

"All right up there?" he called.

"All right!" answered Sadie, turning her head in order to fling the words at him.

"It's going to blow some!"

"It's blowin' now."

"I mean it 'll blow harder. You're not frightened?"

"Ought I to be?"

"No!"

"If you say so I ain't, then."

The hotel lights were now shrouded effectually by the dark mist of rain. Minute by minute the sea rose as the wind laid its grip on the lake. The farther they ran with it the more there would be, Stoddard knew. Yet the only thing to do was to run.

For several minutes he kept the bow of the canoe pointed, as nearly as he could guess, to the hotel on Deepwater Island. The seventeen-foot craft was pitching now, alternately lifting her bow at a sharp

angle, then raising her stern as a wave, thrusting from behind, urged her forward at racing speed.

But it soon became apparent to Stoddard that he could not long hold this course, for the roll of the sea was quartering upon him, so that in addition to the pitching the canoe was rocking from side to side, giving her a corkscrew motion.

He stuck it out as long as he dared; then permitted the bow to fall off until he was headed dead before the wind and sea. The corkscrew plunges ceased, but the pitching became more violent.

"Keep your weight as low as possible!" he called to Sadie. "Lie out straight!"

Sadie obeyed as literally as she could, but her head was still supported by the forward thwart.

"Can't I paddle, too?" she shouted.

"No! Lie still!"

Straight down the South Arm they were running now, as nearly as Stoddard could figure. Their course would not touch Deepwater Island, yet he had no choice of direction. The ever-increasing wind drove them at a speed he could not himself have attained in quiet water. He was putting little weight in the paddle now; he did not dare. Steerageway was all his craft would stand in that sea.

Presently what he had been fearing happened. A sheet of spray, whipped from the top of a wave by a gust, flung itself aboard, leaving half an inch of water in the bottom of the canoe. It was followed a minute later by another, then a third.

Once, when a crested roller lifted the stern as if it

were a feather, he thought the canoe was going to dive head foremost into the hollow ahead. He managed to check the rush with his paddle, but a gallon or so of water shipped itself.

Already he could feel the light vessel acting sluggishly. The water she had taken was rolling alternately forward and aft, throwing added weight where it ought not to be. And there was no hint of a let-up in the gale. Nor did he expect one; this was no thunder-squall that would whip itself out in a few minutes. Stoddard was becoming anxious.

Steadily and ominously the downpour from the black sky added to the water that was coming aboard from the lake itself. When the bow lifted Stoddard found his legs enveloped inches deep in the swash that rushed sternward. He shook his head and muttered something.

"Bail some of this water out!" he yelled.

"What with?"

Although Sadie shouted the question, the words came to him faintly, as if from a great distance.

"Your hat!"

It was a flimsy straw affair, he remembered, and he had little faith in it; but there was nothing else.

Sadie tore it from her head and went to work awkwardly. For a while it seemed that she was gaining a little; then her work was undone by two waves whose crests came aboard in rapid succession. The canoe began to act like a water-logged ship, rising reluctantly, settling as if each dip would be her last.

Stoddard groped in front of him with one hand and laid hold of Sadie's grip. With a quick toss he sent it over the side. The girl heard the splash but did not understand.

"I chucked your grip over!" he shouted.

For an instant the feminine instinct in Sadie leaped to the surface. She uttered a little cry of dismay. Her new things! Gone! Then she fell once more upon the hopeless task of bailing with her hat.

"Good-by, wardrobe," she murmured.

The grip served to lighten the canoe only momentarily, for in mocking assertion of its mastery the gale promptly sent aboard an equivalent weight in water.

It was but a question of minutes now, Stoddard realized. He had no hope that they were close to any shore; the size of the seas that hurled them onward forbade that. He knew also that they were far past Deepwater Island, yet too nearly in the center of the South Arm to have much chance of striking one of the islands that lay below it.

And what of Sadie? His weight of guilt for having lured her into the woods-country he felt growing heavier and more oppressive.

"Got that ulster on?" he cried.

"Yes," came the answer.

"Take it off!"

Sadie obeyed, yet without understanding.

"Throw it overboard!"

Again she obeyed.

The weight of the thing did not count so far as the

canoe was concerned. But Stoddard knew it would count disastrously in the event that could not be long delayed.

"Not alarmed, are you?" he shouted.

"I'm past that. I'm only scared stiff."

"Well, stop it!"

"All right; I will."

In one thing the Fates were kind to Sadie. She was scared, as a matter of course; yet she did not fully realize their plight. It was a condition too utterly unfamiliar to impress her with its significance. She knew that it was wet and dark and stormy and that somehow, where she ought to be sitting in a dry boat, she was crouched in a pool of water several inches deep.

But against all these things she set something else — Mr. 44. She would stake her life that he was not scared. Whatever he told her to do she would do — because he knew! He was big and strong — perhaps as strong as the storm itself.

So whenever she felt a spasm of fright clutch at her heart she thought of the man in the stern-sheets. Sadie had faith.

Presently he ceased paddling and crawled forward in the canoe.

"You're to do anything I tell you!" he commanded sternly.

"Why, sure!"

"Can you swim?"

"Not much. Not in this rig, anyhow, even with the new slit in the skirt."

"Well, you won't have to. But this canoe isn't

going to carry us much farther. Too much water. When it fills we've got to get out of it and hang on to the sides. It'll float."

"All right."

"I'll take care of you. Don't worry. Don't scream. Don't get your mouth full of water!"

"No, sir," answered Sadie mechanically.

A moment later she felt Stoddard's powerful hand gripping her by the arm.

"Here we go!" he called. "Keep your mouth shut."

Very gently the canoe settled down into the lake until its gunwales disappeared below the surface. Stoddard was clutching a thwart, however. As the water rose to their waists he flung Sadie sidewise and leaped after her. But he did not release his grip on the canoe.

Relieved of its burden, it reappeared in a few seconds, a mere outline on the surface, yet floating.

"Take hold of the edge," he ordered. "Hold tight, but don't try to climb up. Just keep your head out. That'll be enough."

Sadie obeyed without answering. She remembered his injunction to keep her mouth shut.

Having made sure that she was gripping the gunwale with both hands, Stoddard began to work his way along the edge until he reached the stern. Then he came back on the other side of the canoe, hand over hand, until he was opposite to her. This accomplished, he reached across, closed his fingers about one of her wrists, and set them in a powerful grip.

"Now we're all right," he said. "We can't sink."

"No, sir," said Sadie.

It was blowing harder than ever. Often a wave swept over their heads, but for the present Stoddard knew they were secure. What worried him now was their lack of progress. They were moving, it was true; but not nearly so rapidly as when the canoe floated. Their speed was merely that of a drifting log.

"Cold?" he asked her after several minutes of silence.

"No; this ain't bad," she answered.

"It won't be long now," he assured her.

"Sure!"

Stoddard presently became aware of the fact that the rain had ceased, although there was not the least lessening of the gale. He turned his glance in every direction, seeking a glimpse of the hotel-lights, but failed to find them. Waves that rose about him limited his vision, while the canoe failed to rise upon the crests, but lurched soggily through them.

Occasionally he talked to her, trying to make his voice confident and cheerful. She answered him in monosyllables, faithfully trying to follow his instruction not to swallow the water that beat into her face and sometimes swept over her head. But often the answers came chokingly.

Half an hour passed thus. Stars were shining overhead, but the lake remained foam-lashed. Stoddard's arm — the one that gripped Sadie across the canoe — was becoming numb from the pressure of

the gunwale across which it lay, but he did not dare ease it. His fingers were locked upon her wrist like bands of iron.

"You're a brick, Sadie!" he called to her.

She did not answer, but she smiled, although he could not see that. He had called her a brick! That came pretty near making it all worth while.

His glance strayed behind him and became fixed upon a black mass that slowly began to shape itself against the darkness. Solid earth! Perhaps it was only an island — yet it was earth.

Would the drifting canoe reach it? He watched steadily. Yes; they were slowly shortening the distance. There was nothing to do but wait. Nearer came the black shape. He could make out trees now, bowed under the weight of the gale. The canoe drifted on with a sodden, maddening lethargy.

"We're going to reach land soon!" he shouted.

"That's good," she answered.

Five minutes later Stoddard's hopes received a shock. They would not reach it if they remained with the canoe! They were drifting past it. Already he could see the shore-line curving away beyond the point opposite them. He turned his glance to see what might lie in the course they were being borne upon. There was nothing but tossing water.

"It's that point or nothing," he muttered to himself.

Distances at night deceive, yet Stoddard was sure that not more than seventy or eighty yards separated them from the land.

"There's land there!" he cried, pointing. "But we've got to swim. The canoe won't go any nearer."

"You swim," said Sadie in a tired voice.

"Both of us!" he said sharply. "Wait till I get hold of you now!"

He fairly dragged her toward him across the canoe, which sank momentarily under her weight.

"I'm a bum swimmer!" she gasped. "You go ahead. You'll make it all right."

"And leave you?"

"That'll be all right. I'll keep hangin' on and maybe I'll reach another piece of land — by and by."

"You'll come with me!" he shouted savagely. "You'll reach that land — over there! Understand?"

"I'll try," she whispered. "But it ain't a square deal for you, No. 44."

He pulled her clear of the canoe, hooked one hand firmly under her arm, and struck out toward the nearest point. Sadie tried to help, but her skirts hampered her legs, while her arms were weary from clinging to the canoe. The waves choked her, too, and the spray that flew into her eyes blinded her.

There were minutes when Stoddard was convinced that they would never make it. Alone, it would have been easy for him. But Sadie was heavy and inexperienced, although she obeyed to the letter his warning not to clutch at him, whatever happened.

The slowness of their progress was agony. Yet

they gained, little by little; sometimes a foot at a stroke, sometimes only inches. His numbed arm bothered him and the seas that constantly washed over them made it difficult to breathe.

Twenty feet away was a rock upon which the waves were breaking. Now the distance was cut to fifteen, now to ten. His heart was pounding furiously and his lungs felt as if about to burst. But only ten feet! He could not fail now!

His fingers clutched for a grip as a wave threw them heavily against the shore, and after an instant's groping lodged themselves in a crevice. For several minutes he clung there, gasping. Then painfully he began to lift his burden out upon the rocks. She was limp in his grasp and could not help him. It seemed to Stoddard that it was an interminable undertaking. Yet he achieved it. Then he climbed slowly up beside her.

Resting for an instant, he stooped and lifted her in his arms. The rock sloped steeply upward toward the woods. He staggered forward, mounting the short rise until his feet touched soil. His foot tripped and he fell heavily, clinging to his burden.

Stoddard lay panting for several minutes beside the quiet figure of Sadie. When he struggled to his knees he seized her hands and began chafing and slapping them.

"Sadie!" he called, bending over her.

He caught a murmur from her lips.

"We're all right, Sadie! We're ashore!"

"Thanks, No. 44," she whispered.

CHAPTER X

SADIE HAS SOME "OUTDOORS"

SEVERAL minutes later Sadie sat up and began pushing back wet tresses from her forehead. The silky masses of her hair, now sodden and dripping, were loosed and falling about her shoulders in disorder. She sighed as she realized the task that lay ahead of her. Her comb was in the grip, at the bottom of the South Arm.

"Feeling better?" asked Stoddard.

"Lots. I sort of caved in, didn't I?"

"You stood more of it than I believed any woman could," he answered quickly. "And a lot of men, for that matter."

"I tried to keep my mouth shut, as you said," she observed. "But once in a while I forgot. I did swaller some water. I'm glad it wasn't salt."

"Cold?"

"No-o."

"Let's get out of this wind, anyway; that is, if you can walk a little."

The point on which they had come ashore was exposed to the full sweep of the wind. Even where Sadie sat occasional showers of spray were borne by the gusts. Stoddard reached a hand to her as she struggled to her feet a little unsteadily. Her soaked

clothing hung upon her heavily, like a suit of mail. She moved her arms slowly and stamped her feet.

"Ugh! It squashes in my shoes!" she exclaimed.

"We'll be dried out before long," he assured her. "Let's get into the lee of the woods."

Leading Sadie, he began picking his way cautiously along the shore, seeking shelter from the gale, which now blew under a cloudless sky. Their path was beset with rocks, trees, and underbrush. Stoddard was almost as weary as the girl herself, but would not confess it.

A few minutes of tedious travel brought them to a spot near the shore where there was an opening among the trees. Here they halted. Although the wind swayed the branches far above their heads, screaming as it passed, little of it reached the drenched pair below.

He found her a seat on a rock and both rested again.

"By and by we can walk to the hotel, I guess," she remarked.

"No walking to-night," he answered emphatically. "The going is too bad. You're going to dry out and then get some sleep."

"Here? Out in the woods?"

"Certainly."

"Say, that'll be kinda fun, won't it? I never slept outdoors in my life."

Sadie was recovering rapidly.

"Thank Heaven, I've got some matches," he said

as he drew from a pocket a waterproof cylinder with a screw top. "We can have a fire and all the comforts of home."

He left her sitting where he had placed her and groped his way a short distance into the woods, seeking firewood. Stuff that will burn readily after a heavy rainfall is not always easy to find, even by daylight, with the aid of an ax. Stoddard had neither light nor ax, so it took him a long time to gather material.

But he persisted until he had carried several armfuls of dead limbs and twigs back to the spot he had chosen for a makeshift camp. It required a longer search to discover dry tinder. Tree after tree he examined with skilled hands, for his eyes were of almost no assistance in the darkness.

He was searching for a dead stump in some sheltered spot that might have been spared the deluge from the skies. Eventually he found one.

The rotted core was wet at the top, but, as he dug into it with his knife, he presently began to extract dry, powdery bits which he carefully treasured. Wringing out his handkerchief, he made a pouch of it and filled it with the precious stuff.

Then he hacked out some dry splinters. With a woodsman's memory for such details, he recalled that his supply of matches was limited to twelve. This meant that there were none to be wasted.

Back to where Sadie sat he carried the "makings" and began clearing a dry spot on the earth, tearing up wet plants and roots and scraping away soggy soil with his steel-shod boots. Then, as care-

fully as a watch-maker adjusting a hair-spring, he constructed the foundation of his fire.

It was a tiny affair, but it was scientific, with fine splinters laid crosswise upon a pile of tinder and larger ones built up about them, like the poles of an Indian wigwam. He worked patiently and deliberately, for a proper beginning was everything.

When Stoddard was satisfied that his handiwork met every requirement he unscrewed the lid of the waterproof cylinder. Just twelve matches he thought it contained; and just twelve matches he found that it did contain. Grunting his self-approval at the possession of a mind which subconsciously could recognize the importance of carrying such details, he extracted a single match. It would be folly to try scratching it on his wet trousers or upon the damp sticks that he had gathered. He bent his head close to the little tinder-pile and jerked the match swiftly between his clenched teeth.

As it burst into a wavering, yellow flame he cupped it in his hands, nursed it for a few seconds, and carefully dropped it among the splinters so that it rested upon the pile of powdered wood. Anxiously he awaited the result of the test. He could afford more matches, if necessary; but Stoddard had a certain pride in using but one match to light any fire, an economy that stood for skill.

As the flame flickered weakly for a minute or two Sadie watched the delicate operation with the interest of a novice.

"It's an awful little fire," she commented presently.

"You were little yourself once," retorted Stoddard as he smiled approvingly upon his work; "but you grew."

"I get you," she said quickly. "I got my answer that time. I might 've known."

For several minutes he did not stir from his post of watchfulness. As the flames took hold slowly he added little sticks, one at a time, after splitting them with his knife so as to expose a dry surface to the blaze. At last he nodded in a confident way.

"We'll have the real thing in fifteen minutes," he announced. "Two of them, in fact."

"Two?"

"So we can sit between them and dry both sides at the same time."

"That's an idea, too," commented Sadie thoughtfully. "I wouldn't 've thought of that."

"You would if you'd been wet as many times as I have."

"I suppose so. Folks catch on to things when they have to. I been learnin' things ever since I saw you comin' down that waterfall. Outdoors ain't so simple as it looks. I guess you know an awful lot about it, Mr. Stoddard."

"What was it you called me out there in the lake, and once after we got ashore?" he asked.

"I don't know as I remember; I was kinda dazed. What did I say?"

"I think you called me No. 44."

"Did I?" Sadie laughed a little and flushed. "I suppose I did. It's the way I got to thinkin'

about you before I seen you. I didn't mean nothin' by it."

"Say it any time you like. I don't mind it."

"Why, all right. It comes kinda easy; that's all."

After his first fire was well under way Stoddard built another some eight or ten feet distant. Their retreat in the lee of the woods was now flooded with yellow light, by which Sadie began to study with eager interest every visible detail, while the illumination helped Stoddard in his search for fuel. He found a log and dragged it to a point between the fires. This furnished a seat for them.

"Shoes off!" he commanded as he began unlacing his own boots.

Sadie obeyed. Two pairs of stout leather footgear were soon steaming at the edge of the fire toward which they faced.

Sadie fell into a reverie as she watched the crackling blaze. She was rather pleased with her outdoors; she did not have a bitter thought even for the lake and the storm. It seemed that things happened quickly in the woods-country, and unexpectedly.

Back in the packing-room people did the same thing again and again, thousands, tens of thousands of times. Here she had already done a score of things, each different from the other. Each was something like an adventure, too; in fact, she was sure some of them were real adventures.

Stoddard spent the minutes in covertly watching her. In the ruddy light he discovered that the

damp coils of hair that fell about her shoulders almost matched the fire itself. Once he furtively fingered a strand that lay across his knee. Sadie felt the touch and glanced down.

"It'll dry after a while," she laughed. "But it'll be an awful mess, 'cause I ain't got a comb. The one I had went swimmin' along with my swell outfit."

"It looks good to me just the way it is," he said with frank admiration.

"It's a fast color, anyhow," said Sadie in a matter-of-fact tone.

But, though her voice was casual, something inside of her gave a little jump. No. 44 liked her hair! That was worth knowing. In the morning, she decided, she would manage somehow to arrange it, even without a comb.

"I'm sorry I had to throw your stuff overboard," he said, his mind reverting to the suddenly ended voyage. "We'd never have managed to get it ashore, anyhow."

"I'm not worryin' about it. I'll get some new things after I get to workin'."

"You'll have to let me lend you some money now, I imagine. Please don't hesitate to say so."

"Not yet," answered Sadie. "Of course my pocketbook is gone; that was in the grip. It had some change in it. But —"

She hesitated, then laughed and colored. "Well, I still got fourteen dollars."

"That'll help some," he said gravely. "Better dry it before it turns to pulp."

Whereupon he arose and sauntered off into the woods, whence he returned several minutes later, dragging a fresh log for the fire. He noted a ten-dollar bill and four ones carefully spread out near the rim of the embers and weighted with little stones. A smile came to his lips, but he hid it from Sadie.

"You got to let me do some work," she said, half-rising from her seat. "I can carry wood."

"You'll have work enough in the morning. Sit still. How's the fire?"

"Great! It's makin' me lazy, though. I just like to sit and look into it — and think."

"About what?"

"Everything. I get funny ideas sometimes, No. 44 — ideas that ain't got nothin' to do with what's really goin' on. Do you know what I was thinkin' of just as we was gettin' upset out there? I was thinkin' what a grand movie it would make."

"You're one of the film fanatics, I take it," he said, laughing.

"I'm strong for 'em, if that's what you mean. Who ain't? I mean folks who live in cities and can't get what they want except in the movies. I went regular. Why, I put aside so much for it every week! I just couldn't miss 'em!"

"How much did you get a week?" he asked curiously.

"Seven dollars."

He considered the possibilities of a seven-dollar income, and found the subject depressing.

"Not very easy sledding," he said.

"Why, I don't know," she returned promptly.

"Of course, you can't buy no automobile and you can't do too much trolley-ridin'. But a girl can manage. I done it. Why, I had a bank-book!"

"The other girls didn't," asserted Stoddard.

Sadie's eyes were alight with astonishment as she turned to him.

"How did you know that?" she demanded.

"I can't say; just guessed it. It's right, isn't it?"

"Yes; it's right. They thought I was a nut. But"— and she tossed her head with a gesture of defiance —"if they'd 've got that letter from you they wouldn't have been able to call on you, like you said to do. They wouldn't 've even had car fare."

So here was the explanation! More than once he had puzzled over the bland assurance with which Sadie cut loose from Buffalo and made her way to the outdoors country, putting her trust in a stranger. Her justification, it seemed, lay in his letter. He remembered the phrase now: "Any time I can do anything for you, don't fail to call on me." So she had called — literally!

Perfunctory commonplaces of correspondence Sadie interpreted to the letter. She appraised things at face value. She knew no subtleties of speech or thought.

It was all beautifully direct and simple, he reflected, and rather to be admired. But a literal-minded young woman was also an incentive to caution. He must be careful.

"Speaking of money," he observed, "it's the last thing that's of any use to you and me until we get somewhere. Let's see what else we've got. I have

a knife and eleven matches. And here's my watch; stopped, of course."

He held the nickel timepiece to his ear, then shook it.

"Full of water," he commented. "Well, we couldn't eat it, and it won't keep us warm; so that doesn't matter."

He completed a search of his pockets, bringing forth a pipe and a dripping tobacco-pouch. The latter he examined anxiously.

"About half a dozen smokes," he said ruefully. "That won't last long."

He laid the open pouch near the fire and blew the water from the stem of the pipe.

"Now, what have you got, Sadie?"

Sadie had been hunting, too, and one find resulted. From a pocket that had been skilfully concealed in her skirt she drew forth a damp, sticky cake of chocolate.

"There's just one end of it been nibbled," she said. "I was savin' it for a feed."

"Great!" he exclaimed. "We've got fire, grub, a knife, tobacco. Why, we're millionaires!"

"You're one of those things yourself, ain't you? An op-ti-mism," pronouncing the syllables carefully. "I told you I'd remember that."

Stoddard now began to consider their prospects minutely. If they were on the mainland there was, beyond doubt, a long and painful tramp ahead of them. No roads had been cut in the Deepwater section, for no timber had ever been taken out, while the only trails that existed in the forests were mere

overland connections between water-courses and lakes.

But he feared that they were not on the mainland at all. While the darkness prevented any accurate survey of their refuge, Stoddard suspected that their swim had landed them upon an island. He did not disclose this belief to Sadie; there was no need to alarm her in case it should turn out later to be incorrect.

Even granting that it was an island, there might be no cause for dismay, despite the fact that they had no means of departing from it. Several of the islands in the South Arm were in plain sight of that which contained the hotel, and a signal made on any one of them would be easily seen.

Judging, however, from the direction of the gale that was responsible for the wreck of the canoe, Stoddard doubted if they were marooned on any such fortunately situated isle. He knew there were deep and seldom visited bays along the edges of the South Arm, many of which were studded with islands that rarely felt the tread of the camper's foot. If it was to one of these they had been driven their case was quite different — and not so pleasant. It meant delayed rescue, and something else that would not be delayed — hunger.

"You're frownin'," observed Sadie. "Anything wrong?"

"Not at all," he answered hastily.

"You don't need to be scared of tellin' me if there is. Is there any animals goin' to hurt us?"

He burst out laughing; then apologized.

"Why, that's all right," she said placidly. "I expect to get laughed at up here, for a while, anyhow. I'm green. I think there's been lots of times already when you wanted to laugh and didn't. It don't hurt my feelin's, so long as it ain't a shrimp laughin'."

Because he wanted to know she told him about shrimps generally and collectively, and the Shrimp specifically.

"The Shrimp wouldn't never have come through that!" she exclaimed in conclusion, pointing out to where they could catch glimpses of the wind-lashed lake.

"The Shrimp," said Stoddard, "after your description of him, would probably have been invited to do his own swimming."

"He'd 've been easier'n me to handle," she said thoughtfully. "I'm a house."

"Nonsense!"

"Maybe I ain't to you, but I am to most people. Do you know what some of the girls used to call me? Woolworth. They said I was as big as the Woolworth Buildin'."

"Did you ever see it?" he asked quietly.

"No. I never was in New York."

Stoddard began poking at the fire and adding fresh wood.

"Well," said Sadie after a pause, "what about the Woolworth Buildin'?"

"Why, it happens to be the handsomest big building in New York; that is all."

"Oh!" gasped Sadie. "Why — oh!"

She seized a stick and began digging in the soil at her feet, bending over to conceal her face. Presently she said "Oh!" again, but she did not look up from her occupation. She was still busily occupied when Stoddard made another trip for fire-wood.

As he strode into the woods she glanced up cautiously and looked after him.

"He'll think I was fishin'," she whispered. "But I wasn't; I didn't know. I never even seen a picture of it!"

Now for the first time she frowningly inspected the rent in her steaming skirt. She began a fruitless search for pins, and sighed. Finding that her hair was nearly dry, she essayed to wind it into a coil on top of her head, although all hairpins had vanished.

"I must try to get a picture of it," she said musingly.

Stoddard finally managed to squirm into his damp boots, after which he made a series of journeys into the brush, returning each time with his arms full of balsam-boughs.

"What for?" she asked finally.

"I'm going to make you a bed," was the explanation.

She watched the construction of it with an eye for every detail.

"There! You'll not find that so bad," he said as he finished his task.

"Bad? It looks elegant!" she exclaimed. "Say, you know a lot about this business; don't you, No. 44?"

"I'm always learning something new."

"You must learn me some of it," she said with a decisive nod.

He bit his lip and shook his head, although she did not see him. Even had she witnessed this involuntary sign of annoyance Sadie would not have understood. She did not know that her speech was always so different from that of Kitty and Estelle.

Stoddard smoked one pipeful of the treasured tobacco and began to feel comfortable again. His clothing was nearly dry. Sadie assured him that she was "perfectly dry," but the wisps of steam that arose from her garments whenever she moved close to the fire testified that she was either oblivious to mere dampness or was prevaricating with a view of relieving him of possible concern for her.

They talked until she found herself yawning, and then she stretched herself upon the balsam couch.

"It's soft and springy and it smells good," she said sleepily. "I've had some outdoors, anyhow, even if it's the last."

After a while Stoddard propped his back against a tree and let his head droop forward on his breast. Only the fire remained awake.

CHAPTER XI

SADIE FINDS SHE'S RICH

MORNING was golden. That is a habit with September mornings in the Deep-water country. The wind still whipped the lake, but there was not so much as a fleck of white cloud in the sky.

It was the sun shining in her eyes that awakened Sadie. She yawned, stretched luxuriously, and mechanically reached an arm toward the place where her sixty-nine-cent alarm-clock usually stood. When her hand touched damp moss she sat up quickly and stared at the trees and the water. Then she smiled contentedly.

"It's real," she said. "I was afraid I'd been dreamin'."

Now her glance rested upon Stoddard, whose shoulders had slipped from their support against a tree and whose body lay at full length on the earth, relaxed in heavy slumber. She contemplated the sleeper gravely for a moment, then smiled again.

Sadie rose cautiously from her balsam couch and tiptoed toward the edge of the lake. The movement brought her close to where Stoddard lay, and she paused to observe him.

"He don't look comfortable," she thought. "I oughta fix his head, but it might wake him."

She resumed her noiseless journey and presently found herself at the brink of the lake. Here, in the immediate lee of the shore, the water was still and clear. How deep it was she had no idea, but the rocks at the bottom were easily visible. Something moved out from the shadow of one, then disappeared from her view like an arrow.

"Wish I had a fishin'-pole!" she exclaimed softly.

Across the stretch of water, more than half a mile distant, lay an island, and beyond that a high bluff that skirted the mainland. To her right were more islands, while on the other direction there seemed to be a long stretch of water bordered ultimately by hills whose outlines were now softened in a blue-gray haze.

Sadie glanced at the sleeper. He had not stirred.

"I'll take a little walk," she said. "No. 44 needs his sleep."

Carefully picking her way along the rocks until she was out of ear-shot, Sadie began to walk as briskly as the contour of the shore would permit. She was not lame, but her muscles were stiff and cramped. Occasionally she halted to stretch her arms upward and backward and fill her lungs to their utmost with the virile morning air. Her dress was nearly dry: an hour of the sun would finish the work.

She halted for a few minutes on a little beach, the first break on the rock-bound shore, and picked up colored pebbles that caught her eye. A pair of birds chirped at her as they ran swiftly about on fallen trees or hopped among the underbrush.

"Hello!" was her greeting.

She continued her journey, which carried her upon a devious course, for the shore was indented with many small coves. Always she bore in mind Stoddard's caution about getting lost. She knew that so long as she clung to the water's edge she was safe from that.

"No hairpins and not even a ribbon!" she said in a vexed tone as her shining hair streamed about her face and across her eyes for perhaps the twentieth time. "I'm a sight!"

Soon becoming conscious of thirst, she stepped close to the water, where a shelving rock sloped gently. Dropping to her knees and holding her hair clear of the surface with one hand, she bent forward, yet paused before she drank. She had discovered a mirror. Sadie was not vain; she was merely feminine. She inspected her image critically, then sighed.

"I'd like to fix up a little before he sees me in daylight," she murmured. "But how can I?"

Her survey completed, she drank deeply, and afterward continued her journey.

"Maybe I'd better be turnin' back," she said after she had followed farther the winding shore. "I've been gone half an hour at least, and he'll be mad if he wakes up and thinks I'm lost. I mustn't be no more trouble than I can help."

There was, however, a little point just ahead, and Sadie wanted to see what was beyond that. She reached it after a scramble through a clump of

bushes, for the rocks dropped steeply here and drove her back from the edge of the water.

Standing on the tip of the point and looking out across the lake, she became aware of something familiar in the landscape. The high bluff she had noted from a camp was visible again and so were the islands she had first seen. Sadie considered this phenomenon for several minutes; then glanced toward the woods behind her. Fifty yards beyond she glimpsed the figure of Stoddard, still prone on the earth.

"Huh!" she commented.

She hastened onward to the camp. A loose stone, dislodged by her foot, clattered down the rocky slope and plunged into the lake. At the noise of the splash Stoddard stirred, then sat up, rubbing his eyes.

"Hello!" he called as he saw Sadie.

"Good mornin'," she answered. "I'm sorry I woke you up."

He rose to his feet and went down to the shore to join her.

"How long have you been up?" he asked sleepily.

"Half an hour, maybe."

"You should have called me."

"I was waitin' for the seven o'clock whistle," she said, smiling.

"It's long past that," he assured her, looking upward at the sun. "It's more like nine o'clock. What have you been doing?"

"I took a walk."

"Trying to walk to the hotel all by yourself?"

"We ain't going to walk to the hotel," declared Sadie with a nod.

"How do you know?"

"'Cause we can't. It's a island."

The information did not surprise him, save for its source. He looked at her inquiringly.

"I started walkin' in that direction," she explained, pointing, "and I kept goin' until I fetched back here. That makes it a island, don't it?"

"It does if you followed the shore," he assented. "I was pretty sure it was an island."

"You didn't say nothin' about it last night."

"No. Of course I wasn't positive; and there wasn't any use worrying you."

"Listen," said Sadie in a tone half-chiding. "Don't keep thinkin' things are goin' to worry me. I ain't the worryin' kind. Anything you got on your mind you can shoot at me and I won't faint. You don't have to hold out nothing."

"Seeing you're already an explorer," he smiled, "I guess there's not much chance of holding out information. You seem to get it ahead of me. What else have you discovered?"

"Just trees and birds and fish and things like that."

He walked to the point, stood there for a moment examining their narrowed horizon, and returned with an announcement.

"This is Pickerel Bay," he said. "It comes in from the east side of the South Arm. That height

you see over there is Indian Ridge. We're miles from the hotel. I'll show you."

He smoothed a spot on the ground and traced a rough map with the point of a stick.

"The island is here," he said, indicating it with a stone. "We're about three miles from the mouth of the bay. We came further than I thought. The hotel is 'way round this point and across the arm."

Sadie nodded as she followed his explanation of the diagram.

"I've been in here often," he added, "but never camped on this island. You found a little beach below, didn't you?"

"That's right."

"I thought so. I know the island now. Did you see anything that looked like a camp?"

Sadie shook her head.

"It has been camped on, I know. But there may not have been anybody here this season. I'll have a look presently. How are you feeling?"

"Oh, fine!"

Stoddard stretched until the muscles in his shoulders cracked.

"My, but you're full of kinks!" she exclaimed.

"The sun'll take them out. It always does."

Stoddard's inspection of Sadie by daylight did not astonish him, yet it chained his glance for a long time. For the first time he sensed the true glory of the cascade of bronze hair that fell below her waist. As the wind stirred it and wafted stray pennants across the path of the sunlight they seemed ready to burst into flame. The pink of her cheeks

and throat, shading softly into ivory-white tints, was a masterpiece of coloring such as he had never before seen. Sadie was an unspoiled triumph of Nature.

A compliment was on his lips, but he stifled it. To Kitty or Estelle it would have come easily and as a matter of course. With Sadie it was different. It would be like paying some trivial praise to a Phidian sculpture, or a canvas by Titian. Mere compliments were childish.

She was conscious of his survey and a little confused, but not displeased.

"If I only had a comb!" she sighed, again reverting to her sorest trouble.

"I think it's all right that way," said Stoddard.

"You wouldn't if it was yours and it was blowin' in your eyes every minute."

"I'll make you a comb later," he assured her. He also formed a silent resolution to be in no haste about the task. "I suppose you're hungry?"

"I could eat," she confessed.

"We might nibble a little of that chocolate."

Sadie hastened to get it. He divided half of it between them and put the remainder aside.

"We'll need that for lunch if we don't find something else," he explained. "Meantime it's short rations."

Sadie looked hungrily at the forbidden bit of chocolate, but said nothing. She knew No. 44 would do whatever was right. If he had told her she must not eat at all she would have obeyed, confident that there were sound reasons.

"I wonder what Larry's thinking," he mused aloud.

"Larry?"

Stoddard was annoyed at his slip. He had not intended to tell her about Larry, just as he had no idea of letting Larry know anything about Sadie.

"The man I'm camped with," he explained. "He's a greenhorn in the woods. I'm just teaching him the ropes."

Sadie puzzled over this intelligence for a while.

"Aren't you working up here?" she asked.

"No," he admitted reluctantly.

"Why, I thought —"

"I'm taking a vacation."

Sadie began to look troubled.

"I sort of thought you belonged here," she said slowly. "I thought maybe you was buildin' a railroad in here, or a bridge."

"It's the same as home to me," he broke in hastily.

Stoddard did not welcome the turn of the conversation.

"Where are you from?" she asked.

"New York."

"Then you're just one of the summer boarders? You got no interests here?"

Stoddard grasped desperately at a straw.

"Oh, I've got interests here, of course. Yes, indeed."

His camp was an interest, he reflected; Livingston was an interest; Sadie was an interest. He

was not telling a lie. He was merely allowing her to infer a lie.

Not a very nice distinction, he admitted; but to let Sadie acquire the idea that he was merely one of the season's campers would lead to embarrassments about the job she still confidently expected to get.

It was no time for Sadie to discover that she had been following a will-o'-the-wisp all the way to Deepwater. In simple and confiding frankness she had accepted him as a responsible person in that part of the big outdoors, with influence and jobs at his command.

Not for a moment did she dream he was a mere idler from afar. It would be time enough for her to discover that when they were released from their island.

"I thought you must have interests," she said in a relieved tone. "It'd be an awful joke on me if you was just a butter-in up here, like I am. You couldn't do nothing for me at all then, could you?"

Stoddard felt his face flush as he met her clear gray eyes. Almost he yielded to the impulse to tell her bluntly the exact situation, yet he held back.

"Want to do a little exploring?" he asked. "I'd like to make a trip around this island myself."

"I'll show you the way," she said eagerly and not a little proudly. "I've been over it."

He marveled somewhat at the ease with which Sadie made progress over the uneven rocks along the shore of their island. Already she seemed to be adjusted to her environment, save for the occasional

hampering of her movements by a skirt that conformed to modern fashion. It was evident she was not easily fatigued, for she led the way at a brisk pace and suffered from no shortness of breath.

Arrived at a point near the farther end of the island, Stoddard diverged from their course along the shore and struck the woods for the distance of a few yards. Then he called to her.

"Here's where there's been a camp," he explained as Sadie reached his side.

"I went right by it and never noticed," she said as she glanced about her with curious eyes.

There was not much to look at. The blackened stones of a fireplace occupied the center of a small clearing. There were a couple of benches, made from saplings nailed across convenient trees, and a table of like workmanship, its top composed of bark strips.

A cupboard was represented by a wooden box fastened to a tree. There was a litter of rusted tin cans near by and a few sticks of split wood.

"Tin canners," said Stoddard contemptuously.

"Meaning — "

This was a phrase of Sadie's equivalent to a request for explanation of something she did not understand.

"Campers who carry a mess of canned stuff with them and are too lazy to throw the cans overboard," he enlightened her.

"Slack housekeepers," she said with a nod.

"That's it. A man ought to keep the woods as clean as he would his own house."

"Cleaner," declared Sadie emphatically. "'Cause the Lord made 'em."

"Hunt around a bit and see what you can find," he advised. "Perhaps this time we'll be glad they didn't clean up."

It was Sadie who announced the first important discovery. Instinctively she made straight for the cupboard. The contents of a half-emptied jar of jam were moldy and spoiled, but in a covered tin box she found crackers. Her shout of triumph brought Stoddard to her side.

The box was a third full. Sadie gazed into its contents longingly.

"Can I have one?" she asked.

He did not know whether her question was amusing or pathetic. She was dreadfully hungry, but with food in her hands she would not eat until "the boss" accorded his permission. For to Sadie, Stoddard was her new boss, whom she was ready to obey without question.

"Why, you poor kid!" he exclaimed. "Eat as many as you want."

It was the first time since she had been big that anybody had called Sadie a "kid." Back in Buffalo she would have regarded such a form of address with derision and probably some resentment.

But from this giant who had suddenly become her protector and guardian in a strange land, she accepted it with complacency. It took a full-sized man to call her a kid, so she knew there was no possible opprobrium in it.

"I'll count 'em first," she said.

A moment later she announced that there were twenty-seven crackers.

"Half of 'em are yours and half mine," she went on. "We'll divide the odd one. I'm goin' to eat three now. Neither of us must lose count. How many are you goin' to eat?"

"Oh, about half a dozen."

"My! That'll only leave you seven and a half. Can't you do with four?"

"All right," he laughed. "Give me four. You're in charge of the cracker commissariat."

Sadie counted four crackers into his hand and three into her own, and carefully replaced the lid on the box.

"We've got to be as savin' as we can," she said, shaking her head seriously, "the way you was with the chocolate. I ain't seen no quick lunches around here yet."

Stoddard continued his hunt about the camp, occasionally picking up and treasuring bits of twine. A lard-pail with a wire handle became the repository of his findings. Sadie, still hovering about the cupboard, discovered a rusty file in a crevice. Stoddard added it to his collection.

"Now look for fish-hooks," he directed.

"Where?"

"In the trees."

"Foolin' me?" she asked reproachfully.

"No; I mean it. Some campers have a habit of sticking fish-hooks in the bark around camp and forgetting to take them when they pack up."

When, a moment later, Sadie whooped joyfully,

he knew that her sharp eyes had made a successful search. She ran to him with a pair of hooks attached to a gut leader.

"I thought so, from the look of the place," he remarked. "A lot of these people throw away more outfit than they use. They ought to have nurses instead of guides."

"It ain't for us to knock 'em, No. 44. We ought to be passin' resolutions and votin' thanks. They've even fed us. What! You've et your crackers already? I'm lingerin' over mine. You'll be beggin' for a bite in a minute."

To herself Sadie added:

"And he'll get it, too."

"Well, let's go on," he said after a final look around. "We'll come back if we need anything else."

"It's a regular notion-counter," she affirmed. "Say, this is some island, ain't it? Tell me something else to find."

"Bugs."

"Ugh! What for?"

"Bait."

"I ain't strong for bugs," she sighed. "But tell me where to look for them."

As they followed the shore-line Stoddard indicated possible bug-haunts under loose stones near the water's edge. Between them they achieved the capture of three hellgrammites by the time they had completed a circuit of the island.

"If we only had the shrimp here we could use

him, too," observed Sadie. "He's a grand size to go on one of them hooks."

Stoddard laughed.

"Your antipathy to littleness seems rather relentless, Sadie. I'm afraid you won't like my friend Larry."

"How big is he?" she demanded.

He indicated the approximate altitude of Livingston.

"That's a little more 'n a shrimp," she said judicially. "I'd say he was a peewee. But if he's a friend of yours I might stretch him into a sparrow. That's a little bigger yet. But it's a cinch he ain't a man, No. 44."

"Whatever he is I'll bet he's worried. If John — that's the Indian — isn't with him he's crazy. Put Larry alone with all our outfit and he's worse off than we are with nothing."

"Nothing!" she echoed. "I think we got lots. I guess you ain't as thankful as you ought to be."

"Perhaps I've had things too easy."

"I wouldn't say you'd had things easy, exactly," she mused, studying him with frank eyes. "I judge maybe you could have 'em easy if you wanted to, but that you don't take 'em that way. Are you rich, No. 44?"

"No. My folks are pretty well off, I suppose."

"But you work?"

"Oh, yes."

"But if you didn't want to work, you wouldn't have to?"

"They'd take care of me, I imagine."

Sadie nodded.

"That's about the way I figured it," she said. "You can take it easy, but you don't want to. You're all right, No. 44. I guess you're more thankful than you're lettin' on."

While he trimmed a rough fishing-rod with his knife Sadie sat at a little distance and watched him. She noted every detail of him, even to the rent in the shoulder of his olive-drab shirt and the tiny holes in the soles of his hunting-boots, where hobnails had been torn loose by rocks. He was unkempt and unshaven, and his big arms, bared to the elbows, were a mass of cuts and scratches.

"And he's rich!" she murmured. "Think of findin' a rich man — here!"

Her glance wandered to the lake, where white-crested waves glistened in the sun; then to the dark greens and browns of the forest, where tufts of yellow and flaming red were the outposts of early autumn. She closed her eyes for a moment, and her mind carried her back to the packing-room, where there were thousands and thousands of shirts and tired girls and stifling air and endless order-slips — and the Shrimp. With a little shudder the vision fled from her as she looked again upon her outdoors.

"Rich!" she repeated softly. "Why, I'm rich, too!"

CHAPTER XII

CASTAWAYS

IT was not Sadie who caught the first fish, a fact that caused her tremendous chagrin. At her eager solicitation Stoddard allowed her to make the first try, which she bungled shockingly.

It was not the loss of the fish so much as the havoc played with their outfit that counted. Sadie managed to lose one of the precious hooks, all of the gut leader, half of the line, and the choicest of the trio of hellgrammites, in addition to a bass that promised a square meal for two hungry castaways.

There had come a savage jerk at the line after she had patiently tended it for half an hour without so much as a nibble. With a yell of triumph Sadie's strong arms yanked the pole skyward and backward, making it fairly whistle through the air. The bass remained in the lake, along with the equipment enumerated.

Seemingly on the verge of tears, she looked at Stoddard.

"I done something wrong," she said miserably. "What was it?"

"You struck too quickly," he explained. "The tackle wouldn't stand it, even if the fish's mouth did."

She surveyed the wreckage with troubled eyes. Then she thrust the sapling that served as a rod into his hands.

"You take it. I oughta known better. You can fine me out of that fourteen. It's comin' to me."

"It wasn't your fault really, Sadie. It's largely the tackle. That knotted string isn't as strong as a regular line, and there's mighty little spring in the pole. I can see we've got to handle it gently."

He had sufficient string to knot together a new line, and to this he fastened the remaining hook.

"I had the best bug, too," commented Sadie ruefully, as she watched him select a second victim for scientific empalement.

It seemed that at least another half-hour had elapsed before the end of the rod bobbed sharply. Sadie uttered a little cry of excitement. Stoddard was excited, too, but sternly repressed his eagerness to get that fish ashore instantaneously. It was too serious a business to be trifled with.

He managed to check the first rush without snapping the line; that gave him encouragement. To apply gradual restraint to a determined bass, with an outfit consisting merely of a sapling and twelve feet of none too reliable string, is a task for a fisherman even more skillful than was Stoddard. But he concentrated upon it.

"Shut up!" he commanded shortly, when a series of little squeals from Sadie vibrated through the air. Whereupon Sadie watched the struggle in silence.

Several times Stoddard nearly slipped from the rock in his efforts to afford his captive every bit of

running-room that the limits of the tackle would permit. Back and forth the string cut across the water. Twice the fish jumped, but the hook held.

Even after the struggles became intermittent and weak, Stoddard did not dare to risk a lift from the water.

"Get down on that flat rock over there," he ordered. "I'll lead him to you."

Sadie scrambled to the chosen spot and waited, scarcely venturing to breathe.

Once Stoddard had the fish within a yard of her outstretched hands, only to be compelled to yield rein for a renewed struggle. Then he began again to urge his prey gently toward the shore. Slowly and protestingly into the shallow water came an object that was to Sadie altogether the most desirable treasure her eyes had ever seen. It still struggled faintly and the line was ominously taut.

"Get both hands on it when I say the word," she heard Stoddard saying.

It was less than a foot from the tips of her fingers now, lying on its side in a few inches of water. He tried to urge it nearer, but the tension on the sapling warned him.

"Now!"

Sadie flung herself upon the fish with startling swiftness. There were a splash and a commotion in the shallows at the foot of the rock. A second later she arose, hugging an object to her breast.

"I got wet again, but I don't care!" she shouted joyously.

She did not release her clutch upon the captive

until she was yards away from the edge of the water, and even then Stoddard had to pry her fingers loose.

"You're the original human landing-net, Sadie," he assured her as he viewed the prize at their feet.

"Did I do all right?"

"Great! Only I didn't know you were going overboard after it."

"I ain't much wet," she said, viewing her dress. "There's only a little water down there. But I wouldn't 've lost that fish if it meant divin' to the bottom for it. Is it good to eat?"

"It's a bass. You wait."

But before Stoddard made any culinary preparations he tried the fishing again. Their third bug was lost with no result after a quarter of an hour's angling and, while Sadie went to hunt for more, he made their single catch ready for cooking.

The fire started the night before had not been allowed to die, for wood was plenty, while matches were not. Consequently there was a fine bed of ashes, overlaid with glowing embers. Stoddard did not skin his bass, but, after cleaning it, proceeded to plaster it over with clay. The clay was not entirely suitable to his purpose, but he made the best of it.

Sadie, who had returned with additional bugs, watched the proceedings in silence, but no single detail escaped her. Just what No. 44 was going to do with that fish she did not know; but she knew that, in any event, it would be right.

Having applied a protective covering nearly an inch thick, Stoddard scraped out a cavity in the bed of fire and carefully deposited the fish within it.

Then he raked ashes and hot coals over the hole and added some fresh sticks to the blaze.

"So that's what to do when you ain't got pots and pans," she remarked in admiration.

"Sometimes you do it, anyhow, Sadie, from preference. Only you'll have to eat this fish without pepper or salt or butter."

"There you go again," she reproved. "You mustn't talk about what you ain't got when you've got enough. By and by you'll be complainin' because there ain't no waiter here to pass things."

Whether to eat the whole fish or save part of it for a future meal became a subject of animated debate when Stoddard gingerly raked it out of the fire. Sadie, now impressed with the wisdom of a policy of conservation, was for keeping half, while Stoddard, confident of their ability to catch another, favored a full-sized meal.

She yielded to temptation, however, when he chipped away the baked clay and stripped off the skin on the upper side of the bass. The present outweighed the future. They ate the whole of it.

The afternoon brought a round of duties. Their camp was still a make-shift; Stoddard set about the task of providing some comforts.

A little lean-to for Sadie was his first achievement. It was no easy work to cut saplings with a knife, but he persisted until he had secured sufficient to form a framework for the shelter. It rose no higher than four feet above the ground in front, tapering off to nothing in the rear.

Sadie helped to gather balsam for the roof and

handed him the boughs one by one as he thatched it thickly. The little house, as she called it, aroused her unbounded enthusiasm, and also filled her with a sense of possession that delighted her because it was so new and unfamiliar. A foot deep he piled the balsam-bed after rolling a log across the entrance to hold the boughs securely in place.

This finished, they began to gather fire-wood. Sadie carried it by the armful, heedless of scratches on her arms and damage to her clothes. She was eager to be doing something, and tireless. Stoddard dragged heavy logs from where they had fallen in the woods and added them to their store. They could afford to be prodigal in fuel, for the island was generous.

This labor ended, he allowed himself a pipeful of tobacco and resumed fishing. He also found leisure to do some thinking, an occupation which, however, brought him no particular satisfaction nor ease of mind. True, they were doing finely so far as immediate needs were concerned; but beyond that their situation was wrapped in the haze of uncertainty.

Sadie, too, was thinking, but wholly of the present. Her imagination had been swept from its moorings by this sudden plunge into the heart of her great outdoors, and it was carrying her onward with bewildering and beguiling allurements. Hardship, privation, possible starvation played no part in any of her wonderful visions.

"See here, Sadie!" said Stoddard suddenly. "Have you done any figuring as to what's likely to happen to us?"

"Why, no," she answered slowly. "Anything bad goin' to happen?"

"Not necessarily; in fact, not even probably. But I mean, have you thought about how we're going to get off this island?"

"Now you speak of it, I don't think I've thought of it for a minute. Will it be any trouble? Won't somebody come and get us?"

"Who, for instance?" he inquired.

"Maybe your camp-mate, Mr. Livingston, might."

"He hasn't the least idea what's become of me. The last he saw or heard of me I was on our own island back in the Northeast Arm."

"Well, he can begin tracin' you, can't he? He knows you started for the railroad first."

"No; he doesn't."

"Didn't—"

Sadie hesitated. Stoddard waited.

"Didn't he know you were goin' to meet me?"

"He never heard of you, Sadie."

She devoted a minute to readjusting her thoughts.

"I just sort of took it for granted you told him," she said.

It was difficult to explain to Sadie just why he had not informed Larry Livingston of the letter found in a pocket and the events to which it led; it was impossible, in fact.

"Well, you see, Sadie, it was just a private business matter between you and me," he said after a pause. "I didn't feel I had a right to show him your correspondence. . There was nothing for him

to do about it, anyhow; it was my affair. So I said nothing."

"I understand," she nodded.

This respect for the privacy of her correspondence pleased her. She did not dream that there might be other reasons.

"Larry knows nothing," Stoddard went on. "John — the Indian — knows that I mailed a letter and received a telegram. That's as far as his information goes.

"Billy Mason, the station-master, knows I was at Deepwater yesterday evening, and that — Well, that's all he knows.

"The conductor of the train you came on knows that you got off at the lower station and that he informed me of that fact. But where I went and what I did after I left Deepwater Station not a soul knows except you."

"Just like you'd dropped off the earth," she commented.

"Exactly. All Larry and John know is that I did not return to camp. Larry will have no theory whatever. John, because he knows I received a telegram, is likely to conclude that I must have left Deepwater by train on some urgent business. So he's not likely to look for me."

"Go ahead," said Sadie.

"I'm just telling you the situation because you asked me not to hold anything out."

"That's right, No. 44. Say it all."

"Well, to sum it up, not a soul has seen either you or me since dark last night. Nobody knows we

started for the hotel; nobody knows what happened. Nobody has any reason to look for us, except Larry, perhaps, who doesn't know where to look; while nobody has the least idea where to look, even if they wanted to."

Sadie had been indicating her complete grasp of the situation by a series of nods.

"That's one end of it," he continued. "Here's another: Pickerel Bay is off the line of travel hereabouts. Campers wander in here occasionally, but the guides never suggest it. It's not considered a particularly good place for fishing, which is what most of the campers want. The islands in other parts of the lake are much more comfortable for general purposes.

"This camp we found has been vacant for at least a month. I don't see any signs of others on any of the islands near-by. All of which means we are not very likely to have visitors."

"Well, it ain't as if we were lonesome," she observed gravely. "I ain't, anyhow."

"So it leads up to another proposition," he said, appearing not to notice her comment. "If we're going to get off this island we must do the job ourselves. To get from an island to the shore means a boat. We have none.

"The nearest piece of land to us is about three-quarters of a mile, and that's another island. Furthermore, it's in the wrong direction. It's true that we might manage to swim to it. But we wouldn't be any better off after reaching it than we are now."

"We won't swim," said Sadie decisively.

"You've probably noticed it's still blowing almost as hard as last night, although it's clear. That means no boats out on the lake to-day, except the launches that run from the station down to the hotel, and they don't come within sight of us."

"Well?" she asked when he paused.

"Well, now you know the situation; that's all."

"But what's the answer?"

"That's what I wish you'd tell me. I don't know the answer."

Sadie considered the case for several minutes; then shrugged her shoulders and smiled cheerfully.

"It is sort of a puzzle," she admitted. "But nothin' to worry about, I guess. You'll get the answer by and by. We'll both try to think one out.

"We got twenty crackers left, and half a cake of chocolate, and we'll catch more fish. We got plenty of water to drink. We don't need to eat again to-day after that feed we had. Why, I think we're fixed fine!"

"Shake, Sadie! You're a good sport, and you're game. Of course we're bound to get out of here. But I wanted you to know all the facts."

Sadie was flushing with gratification. She had been hoping she was a good sport.

The taking of another fish served as an abrupt interruption to idle speculations. It was not a large bass, but Sadie was as ardent for its capture as if it were the leviathan of them all. She pounced upon it hawklike when it had been drawn into the shallows, heedless of the viciously erected dorsal fin.

When biting ceased at the spot opposite their

camp Stoddard moved along the shore, trying other places that seemed likely to yield prey. Sadie followed, occasionally rambling a little distance into the woods.

She loved to explore. She wanted to learn, too. Usually she returned with specimens gathered from shrubs and bushes and mossy retreats. Stoddard knew most of them, and she put the names away in her faithful memory with a sense of new knowledge.

They had gone nearly the length of their island, and Stoddard was intent on the effort to coax a nibble into a well-developed bite when he heard a scream from Sadie.

Dropping his rod, he scrambled up the rocks and broke through the brush in the direction of the sound. Sadie, running as fast as her skirts would allow, met him half-way. She was breathless; her eyes were wide with excitement.

"A bear!" she gasped.

"What!"

"A bear! I seen it!"

"Nonsense! Wait a minute now. Get your breath."

But Sadie would not wait until she had recovered from her panting.

"I tell you it *was* a bear!"

"How big?"

"I don't know. But it was a bear."

"Where was it?"

"I went back up to where that old camp is," she blurted between gasps. "The place where we

found the crackers. I was just lookin' around again. And then I heard something. And then I *seen* it!"

"And what was it doing?"

"It was lookin' at me!"

"I don't blame it," said Stoddard lightly.

He was more than skeptical of Sadie's story. Bears were uncommon and shy in the Deepwater and they did not prefer small islands. He believed that Sadie might have seen a shadow.

"Did it move?" he inquired, checking a smile.

"I didn't wait. *I* moved. But it had eyes."

"Let's see if we can find it."

"Will it hurt us?"

"It 'll probably be glad to see us. Come on and show me where it was."

Reluctantly she followed him. She knew very well she had seen a bear, and bears were animals that Sadie instinctively classed with lions and tigers in their undesirability as neighbors. As Stoddard neared the old camp-site he moved cautiously. If anything *should* happen to be there, he did not want to frighten it away.

The long shadows of late afternoon filled the woods. At the edge of the clearing he stood for a minute until his eyes were fully accustomed to the dimming light. Then, as his glance followed the direction of Sadie's arm, which was thrust over his shoulder, he saw that something did move!

It was near one of the rude benches. If it saw him it betrayed no evidence of alarm. Sadie was beginning to pant again; Stoddard could feel her

breath on his cheek. For a few seconds he studied the object; then nodded to himself.

Now he glanced over the ground near his feet, searching for something. A couple of yards from him lay a stout split stick. He stepped forward softly and stooped until his fingers clutched it. Then he crossed the clearing on a run.

Sadie stood horrified. How could a man fight a bear with a stick? Surely No. 44 was dashing into the jaws of death! She saw the club raised over his head and saw it descend swiftly. It fell upon something with a muffled, soft concussion. Again it rose and fell; then several times in rapid succession. She saw him deliver a mighty kick at a convulsively squirming body, which drove it several feet toward the center of the clearing. After that he began beating it again until it lay quite still.

When he seemed satisfied with his work he looked up and beckoned to her. With hesitating footsteps she went to him, her glance still riveted upon the thing that lay on the ground.

"You killed it!" she whispered. "Killed a bear with a stick!"

Stoddard was grinning at her.

"Porcupine," was all he said.

Sadie felt suddenly foolish. She knew nothing of porcupines, though she had an idea that they were infinitely lower in the scale of ferocity than bears. At any rate, she had never heard of a porcupine killing anybody.

"Is it another laugh on me?" she asked, crestfallen.

"Not at all. You made a real discovery. Only it's not a bear."

He turned over the animal with his foot. Sadie bent to examine it.

"Rather tough to beat a poor porcupine to death with a club," he declared. "But we needed him."

"You mean to say it's any good?" she asked, looking up from her inspection.

"It can be eaten."

"Honest?"

"Some of them can, at any rate. The young ones are all right. I'm not sure about this boy, but we'll have a try at him. He's big and he's old, and he's probably as tough as walrus-hide. But we'll know more about that later. The main thing is to get him to camp."

"I'll help you carry it," she said readily, all hesitation having vanished in the discovery that no bear dwelt upon their island.

"Keep your hands off him; he's full of quills like needles. I'll have to drag him."

He unbuckled the leather strap that served him for a belt, passed it around the neck of Sadie's "bear," and drew it taut. Then, dragging the creature behind him, he led the way for their camp.

The removal of a porcupine's hide is a task to be performed with caution if the hunter has a proper regard for his fingers. Accomplishing it after much labor, Stoddard began to slice strips of meat from the carcass.

"He's tough, all right," he commented. "You might fill that lard-pail with water, Sadie."

Later, when the pail had been suspended across their fire on a green stick and Stoddard had dropped a number of pieces of meat into it, he explained that an indefinite amount of parboiling was the first step toward eating porcupine of advanced age. Sadie agreed with him when, after an hour of parboiling and several minutes of roasting over the flames, she attempted to set her teeth in a juicy strip.

"It chews like an automobile-tire," she observed. "Keep it boilin', No. 44."

Long after dark the contents of the pail were still simmering.

"We'll try it again in the morning," yawned Stoddard.

The wind had died with the day; the trees above them stood motionless. There was a peaceful somnolence about the island that stole into the minds of the castaways. They were indolent and content. There was nothing to live for but the moment. To-morrow would be another day; it could take care of itself.

The subtle mesmerism of the big outdoors had placed its spell upon them. They asked nothing, wanted nothing. Everything worth having was theirs.

Stoddard had fallen asleep by the fire when Sadie stole softly into the little shelter he had built for her. She knelt for a moment on the balsam-boughs, her head bowed, her lips faintly moving. Then as she lay down with a comfortable sigh she murmured:

"That was twice, because I forgot 'em last night. And I put *him* in!"

CHAPTER XIII

"US FOR A RAFT!"

STODDARD went swimming at dawn. When he tiptoed out of camp and made his way toward the farther end of the island he chuckled at having repeated Sadie's trick of the day before. He did not know she was watching him through half-closed eyelids, feigning sleep. As he disappeared from view she smiled.

"No. 44 thinks he's puttin' something over," she murmured. "I guess he gets tired havin' a woman hangin' around all the time. I would if I was him."

She settled herself contentedly for another nap. Her mind would not have been so peaceful had she known that he would soon be rolling luxuriously in water ten times over his head.

There is no chill in the Deepwater in early September. It has been storing warmth from the sun the summer long and has not yet begun to yield back that which it has put by. The cold water has settled to the depths and the big fish have followed it, whence they are to be taken only by the angler whose line runs far below the surface; above, the summer has been preparing the swimmer's bath.

Stoddard struck far from the shore in his morning revel. The touch of the water thrilled him.

He felt that he could swim on and on the day long if he chose. Time and again he plunged his head beneath the mirror-like surface, fairly wallowing in the crystal medium that sustained him. Then he would lift it, shake the shining drops from his hair, and dash forward with mighty overhand strokes as if there were a goal to be reached.

All the boy of him was awake. Sometimes he dived, swimming swiftly beneath the surface, to rise again twenty or thirty yards distant. This was "playing loon." Again he lay upon his back and thrashed the lake furiously with his arms and legs until forced to rest from sheer want of breath. Then he would float, staring at the blue sky.

No longer was he pent-up, marooned, on a lonely island; he felt free again; he could go where he willed. In truth, had it not been for the girl in the camp Stoddard would have given no thought to turning back. He would have laughed at his prison and left it to its solitude in the mists of the morning.

Reluctantly he doubled on his course and swam lazily back toward the point from which he had dived; still more grudgingly did he draw his dripping body from the sunlit water. At his feet he could see far down among the rocks, where the bass lurked in the shadows in the heat of the afternoons. He wanted to plunge again and explore. Oh, for a day in the wonder-lagoon of "The Coral Island," with *Ralph Rover, Peterkin,* and *Jack!*

He dressed slowly and followed the shore back to camp. Sadie had risen and was sitting on a rock down by the water, trying to comb her bronze aurora

with her fingers. As she drew heavy strands of it across the sunlight it flamed gorgeously, until it seemed to give forth a light of its own.

Stoddard, softly approaching, halted for a little and watched with eyes that marveled.

"She's wonderful!" he whispered. "And she comes from a factory! I don't believe it. It *can't* be true! Why, it's impossible! It's easier to believe she has stepped out of some ancient legend."

His musing was interrupted when Sadie turned suddenly, as if feeling his presence through a sixth sense.

"'Mornin'!" she called gaily. "I ain't seen that comb you was goin' to make me."

The spell was shattered. Somehow the breaking of it hurt; it filled him with vague sensations of annoyance and pity. He wondered if she was doomed forever to speech like that. Kitty and Estelle talked differently; they were "educated." Would this splendid creature never be permitted to talk as they talked?

No; he did not mean that either. His Fifth Avenue friends, Kitty Fitch and Estelle Wallace, talked much foolishness and shallowness; they purred comfortably and quite contentedly about the feathery things that floated on the surface of life. He did not want Sadie to do that; he knew she could not, for her mind reached into the quiet depths. The soul in her was strong and brave and wise. But — if only some magic would touch it and give it speech!

"Your hair's all wet," she observed as he stood staring at hers.

"I've been swimming."

"O-o-oh! It was fine, I bet."

"I almost hated to come back," he confessed. "I just wanted to go on forever."

"And how far did you go?"

"Oh, a quarter or a third of a mile, perhaps."

"Straight out from shore?"

He nodded. Sadie frowned and her face became suddenly grave.

"You mustn't do that, No. 44," she said.

"Why not?"

"Suppose anything happened to you?"

"But nothing could happen."

"It might," she said, unconvinced. "Then I'd be in a nice fix."

Just why she added the last sentence she was not clear in her mind. It did not carry the real reason for her anxiety. It was not her plight that would disturb her if anything happened to him; it would be the plight of No. 44 himself.

Perhaps the explanation slipped from her in a moment of purely feminine evasion; it seemed to come automatically, to cloak a thought that her lips were too shy to utter.

"I'm always careful, Sadie," he answered. "I don't take chances just for the fun of it."

"Well, I'll let it go this time," she said solemnly.

A few seconds later she burst into laughter.

"I was just tryin' how it sounded to boss some-

body," she explained, her gray eyes animated with amusement. "I ain't ever had a chance at that. I've always been bossed myself. Of course I can't really boss you. I bet nobody can."

"I'm not so sure, Sadie."

"I am. You're one of the bosses yourself. You boss me."

"I don't mean to."

"Yes, you do, No. 44. You bossed me out there in the water; you boss me here on the island. You bossed me yesterday when — "

"I'm sorry," he broke in. "You must stop me whenever I start."

"Stop nothing!" exclaimed Sadie. "I wouldn't stop you. Why, I *oughta* be bossed! Suppose I hadn't took orders from you night before last. Where 'd I be now? Drownded — like my wardrobe.

"No; you just got to boss me! I need it. You mustn't think I mind. Not a bit! Why, I *like* it! That is, I like bein' bossed when — "

She hesitated, undecided whether she ought to say it. As a result of the pause, she compromised.

" — when I ain't gettin' orders from the Shrimp."

"He's absolutely barred, is he?"

"Forever and amen! Why, No. 44, when I think of what I've took from him I could just jump out into the middle of that water. I get ashamed of myself. Of course I talked back. But that didn't really count. I had to do what he told me.

"It wasn't *what* he told me, either; I didn't mind doin' the work. It was because the bossin' come

from *him*. I never stood for much since when I was in school."

Stoddard contemplated her for a moment before he spoke.

"You went to school — back in Ohio?" he suggested.

"Uh-huh. It's a good while back, too. I was through with that before I was fourteen. I've been workin' since." Sadie wound a strand of her hair round one finger.

"I want to ask you something," she said after a little.

"Go ahead."

"Will you answer straight?"

"I'll try to."

"Do I talk very bad, No. 44?"

She almost whispered the question.

"I don't think you talk badly at all, Sadie."

"That's not answerin' straight," she said, looking up at him. "You promised."

"I think you talk a lot of sense," said Stoddard hastily. "Truly I do."

"That might be," she assented. "Sometimes I'm sensible, I know. But I mean, the way I say it?"

"Every person talks in his own way," he temporized.

She shook her head and twisted another strand of hair round another finger.

"You don't want to hurt my feelin's," she said. "I understand. But it's like this: I've been listenin' to you talk a whole lot, and you and me talk

different. It's because you're educated and I ain't.

"And I guess most of the things I say sound pretty awful to you. I noticed you looked at me kinda funny once or twice."

"Sadie!"

Stoddard flushed with mortification.

"It's all right," she continued calmly. "Why, I can understand. You see, even if I don't say things right, I can 'most always tell when somebody else says 'em right. A good deal of the way I talk is habit, but not all of it. The rest's because I'm ignorant.

"Back in Ohio, before I left the farm, I could talk better 'n I do now. But workin' in the city I sort of fell in with talkin' like the people I worked with. None of us had no real education. Back there it was all right. Maybe it wasn't all right either; what I mean is, it was good enough to get by with.

"It's a slack way of gettin' on, of course. You get to slangin' along and by and by you talk that way all the time. I never noticed it much till I got up here. But now—" She made a little gesture of resignation.

"Sadie," said Stoddard gently, "remember this: The most important thing about talking is not how you say it, but what you say."

She pondered this and nodded slowly.

"You said something, then, No. 44, even if it was meant to let me out. But then it's better, when you have got something to say, to be able to say it right,

too. Do you guess I'm too old to learn? I'm twenty-four."

"We're never too old to learn anything," he declared vehemently.

"I suppose I could, if I got my mind onto it," she mused. "You see, I'd hate to have to always be workin' at some job like packin' shirts. You got to have an education if you want to get good wages. Of course, you got to have sense, too, but the education's part of it — a lot of it.

"Some day I'm goin' to try to begin all over again. I'd like to get a job where I could use my head. But I ain't ready for that now. Maybe it 'll be years; I don't suppose I'll ever get very good at it. What sort of a job do you think I'll get up here, No. 44?"

Thus they were back to the topic that most disturbed Stoddard.

"You see, havin' interests here," she added, "you oughta be able to give me a pretty good idea."

"The trouble is, Sadie, you'll want to be outdoors, and I can't think of any outdoor jobs for women right now."

"I wouldn't expect it to be all outdoors," she said. "Just so 's I could feel outdoors was right next to me, and I could look at it once in a while and get into it after the whistle blew. There ain't no factories here, I suppose?"

"I don't know of any. The trouble is, up to date it has been mostly a man's country. Nearly all the women here are tourists."

"I guess that's right," she nodded.

"Would you want to work in the hotel?"

Stoddard had not the least idea whether he could get Sadie a place in the hotel. He merely grasped at the straw.

"Why, that 'd be all right!" she exclaimed. "You mean waitin' on the table or doin' washin'? I'm strong enough, easy. I'll tackle anything, No. 44 — except where they're lookin' for education. I can't go that yet."

"I'll see what I can do at the hotel then, as a starter."

"It'll be a cinch for you," she declared confidently. "They won't turn *you* down! They can't afford to turn down people with big interests."

Stoddard stirred uneasily. He felt himself slipping deeper into the mire of misunderstanding. He did not even know who was managing the hotel; he merely knew it had changed hands. As for his "interests," they were mythical in the sense that Sadie meant.

"Well," she said, smiling, "I guess that settles the job-question. I'll go to work in the hotel."

In great peace of mind she resumed the combing of her hair with her fingers. Stoddard went up to the camp, cursing himself, and set about the getting of some breakfast.

The flesh of the aged porcupine after a night of simmering over the fire seemed that it might yield grudgingly to human teeth. He spiked several strips of it on green sticks and set them over the embers to broil.

After he had scrubbed their lard-pail with sand, Stoddard proceeded to put it to another culinary use. When he called Sadie to breakfast a surprise awaited her.

Hot chocolate!

She clapped her hands in wonder.

"It's a little weak," he apologized, "because I used only half of what was left. But it's better than cold water."

"It's grand!" she cried after she had sipped gingerly. "Where's yours?"

"We'll both have to drink out of the pail."

The porcupine had one sterling merit — he promised to last a long time. It was out of the question to chew him rapidly. On the contrary it required much perseverance and excellent teeth to reduce even one strip of him to the point where it could be swallowed.

But he was meat, fresh and very much like pork, and both Stoddard and Sadie were ravenous. They drank alternately from the tin pail and had an altogether gay breakfast.

"What's the program?" demanded Sadie after she had washed the dishes, an occupation which consisted of rinsing the tin pail in the lake.

"The program is to get off this island," he replied with emphasis.

"All right. How?"

"Well, how does this strike you? I'll swim over to the mainland, resting at one island on the way. Once there I'll go along shore until I come to the

entrance to this bay. From there I can see across to the hotel on Deepwater Island. I'll make signals with something and get help."

Sadie considered this, then shook her head.

"You got that idea from goin' in swimmin', didn't you?"

"Partly."

"You mean to swim as far as that land over there?" she asked, pointing across the water.

"That's not very far."

"No, No. 44; I can't let you."

"But it's easy. I've often swum twice as far. Why, I swam as far as that this morning."

"But just suppose you didn't make it," she said. "Just suppose —"

Sadie covered her face with her hands for an instant.

"No; nothing like that, No. 44," she declared earnestly. "I won't let you. I'm goin' to do that much bossin'."

Stoddard shrugged his shoulders.

"And besides," she added, "how about me? If you don't make it maybe I'm here for the winter. I suppose I'd have to hole up like a bear. I never tried it, but I bet I ain't any good at it. Let's think up something else."

"It's the best chance I can think of," he said grumblingly. "Of course, if you won't —"

"That's right; I won't," said Sadie. "I just can't!"

"But it's perfectly safe."

"That's one thing I ain't goin' to take your word

on," she replied slowly. "Maybe I'm silly, but I can't help it. And don't get mad at me, because — Well, because. That's enough reason."

She reached across and patted him on the hand.

"There now," she said soothingly. "We won't talk about that any more. You wouldn't leave me here alone, No. 44. And I wouldn't *let* you!"

He laughed a little and drew gently at his pipe. It was the next to the last smoke.

Sadie was experiencing something akin to elation, but was careful to repress signs of it. She had bossed him! She was not altogether sure she had a right to do it; she freely admitted that in the ways of the Deepwater country he knew all, while she knew literally nothing.

If he said he could swim it, he could. But she did not *want* him to go! She felt that he must not, even if it was the only chance. Yes, she would rather starve right there on the island — so long as she was not starving alone.

As for Stoddard, he did not put the scheme out of his head. He merely laid it aside until Sadie might be in a more reasonable or desperate mood. One or the other would doubtless make her content to let him swim for it, he figured.

"You know we went over all the chances yesterday," he observed. "They're not any different to-day."

"Maybe there's some we didn't think of," she said. "Let's try and find some more. And it is a little different to-day, anyhow. It's not blowin'."

"Well?"

"You said the blowin' would keep boats from comin' out. Now they can get around all right."

"Yes. But I also said it was very unlikely that any would be coming into Pickerel Bay."

Sadie mused over that for a while.

"It seems to me we've just got to get a boat of our own," she observed. "Couldn't you build one?"

"With a knife?"

Sadie subsided. She did not think even No. 44 could do that. And if he could, it sounded like a task that would take years.

They sat in silence for many minutes, Sadie alternately frowning and shaking her head as she groped for ideas and found them elusive. Suddenly she sprang up.

"I got it!"

Stoddard regarded her with an amused look.

"I got it from the movies!" she exclaimed. "Don't laugh. I got to rememberin' about two shipwrecked folks, a man and a woman. They was away off somewheres on a island, where there wasn't any ships likely to come by, only they'd been there for months and months, and we've been less than two days. So what do you suppose the man done?"

"Grew wings," suggested Stoddard. He knew that all things were possible on the flying film.

"He built a raft!"

Sadie stood beaming down upon him.

"And they got on the raft and sailed away until a ship found 'em," she added. "And then —"

She stopped suddenly and felt herself growing

pinker about the throat and cheeks. In the movies they had lived happily ever after, she remembered very distinctly.

"Well, then what?" he asked.

"Then they was saved," she said primly.

Stoddard knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"Sadie," he said, rising, "I believe there's something in that raft idea of yours. Want to try it?"

"You bet!"

"Willing to help?"

"Am I!"

"Then we'll make believe we're the movie folks. Come on."

For an instant Sadie stood in a trance of ecstasy, her eyes turned heavenward.

"Us for a raft!" she whispered. "Glory!"

CHAPTER XIV

RESCUE

SADIE insisted that she be allowed to share in the heavy work of moving dead logs. Stoddard was obliged to consent, against his instinctive dislike to see a woman engaged in toil that usually falls to the lot of a lumberman. But long before the task was over he was glad to have the help of her sturdy arms. Without her their raft would have lacked more than one substantial timber that he, single-handed, could not have moved from its resting-place.

Nor did he find the participation of Sadie in this labor so distasteful to his preconceived notions as he anticipated. There was something rather magnificent about it as she bowed her back to the toil. Her confident young strength and her ardent will to put it forth to the utmost aroused admiration in him as well as astonishment.

He found himself unconsciously pausing in his work to watch her. She found joy in the hardest tasks and inspiration in a drudgery that would have appalled the women of his own world. She knew that his eyes were often upon her, a fact that spurred her; she would prove to him her competence to live in the big outdoors.

While the heart of the little woods that clothed their island yielded some of the material that went into the raft, the greater part was found as a result of repeated expeditions along the shore, where there were dead stumps, branches, and portions of tree-trunks, stripped of their bark and dried to the core by sun and wind. In the woods the fallen trees were apt to be damp and rotted, scarce able to float their own weight.

Their work had to be done with no tool save Stoddard's knife. An ax would have made raft-building easy; without it they were forced to use only the wood that Nature and the elements had felled; nor could they shape it to their needs.

Stoddard selected a shallow, sheltered cove as a shipyard. Here, frequently waist-deep in the water, he began the actual putting together of what Sadie had already christened *The Ark*. It was weary and often discouraging work. Such logs as he had bristled with knots and jagged branches and would not lie evenly together. The dead limbs were often small and twisted, and scores of them were needed to make up the deficiency of solid timber.

While he thus labored Sadie combed the woods for roots, vines, and green withes that would serve to hold their makeshift craft together, for nails and rope were denied them. It took a tremendous quantity of fiber-binding to make *The Ark* even reasonably secure. Now and then Stoddard would test its carrying capacity by climbing upon it, only to shake his head as it dipped from side to side under his weight.

Their big timber exhausted, he set Sadie to work tying together bundle after bundle of small dry twigs. These he thrust underneath the raft to give added buoyancy. It was like building a ship out of matchwood, but necessity gave Stoddard no choice.

As the raft grew and he found that it bore his own weight easily, he made tests with the added weight of Sadie. She was quite willing to wade into the water and clamber aboard, but Stoddard saw no need of that. Instead he went to the rock where she was standing and picked her up in his arms as if she were no more than a mite of a girl.

Sadie uttered an involuntary exclamation of astonishment as she was thus lifted from her feet and borne to the floating platform of *The Ark*. She knew that Stoddard was strong, but this was a demonstration that filled her with new surprise. Also, it brought a flush to her cheeks. For the first time in her life she found herself in a man's arms; in addition she was being handled as if she were a veritable baby.

Placing her in the center of the raft, Stoddard climbed up beside her. It rocked ominously; then began to settle on one side. Before the water reached their feet he leaped off again, picked Sadie up and carried her ashore on his shoulder.

"More wood," he told her briefly.

This made necessary a new expedition along shore, where they gathered up material at first contemptuously rejected. Bit by bit they added to their craft. Engineer though he was, Stoddard had no means of calculating displacement and net ton-

nage for *The Ark*. It was built by rule of thumb, and nothing short of actual trial would prove its capacity.

Several times more he transported Sadie to the undulating, nondescript platform, always to her secret delight and wonder. It was with a little sigh that she finally received his announcement that *The Ark* would carry them both.

"Just how it'll navigate I can't tell," he told her. "But it will float anyhow."

"Could we make a sail?" she asked.

"I thought of it. But the best we can do is a thatch of balsam-boughs. They may help a little."

Sadie promptly ran back to the camp and began dismantling her shelter in order to obtain the material. At one end of the raft Stoddard managed to erect a sort of screen, three or four feet in height, that would serve to catch a little wind.

"If the breeze holds this way we'll get some benefit from it," he said. "But you mustn't expect much speed."

"I ain't in a hurry," she answered.

In fact, far from being in haste, Sadie found herself, as the time for embarkation approached, decidedly reluctant to set forth at all. It was not that she was timorous concerning the seaworthiness of *The Ark;* she had implicit confidence in it and much pride, for it represented her own handiwork as well as that of No. 44. But she was reluctant to leave their island elysium. She had in truth fallen in love with it, and had come to look upon it as something that was her very own.

"I hate to quit it," she confessed to him. "It's like sayin' good-by to a friend."

"It was pretty friendly a couple of nights ago," he admitted. "But we mustn't outstay our welcome."

"It's been friendly all the time," she asserted stoutly. "And some day I'm comin' back to it and say 'Hello!'"

Stoddard paid a visit to the old camp at the farther end of the island, returning with the box that had been used as a cupboard. This he placed upon *The Ark* as a seat for Sadie. He had also picked up a few nails, with which he contrived to fasten a couple of small boards to the ends of saplings, which he intended should serve as paddles.

"Now for the grub," he declared.

The provisioning of *The Ark* was a trifling task. All they possessed were a few strips of porcupine and half a dozen treasured crackers.

"I'm glad an appetite don't weigh anything," observed Sadie. "If it did *The Ark* 'd never hold you and me, No. 44."

It was midafternoon when Stoddard for the last time carried Sadie aboard, seated her upon the box, and enjoined her to remain quite still and in no wise do anything to disturb the trim of their ragamuffin craft.

She burst out laughing as he climbed after her and took his place in what he described as the sternsheets.

"I was just thinkin'," she said, "that you don't look much like Noah."

"If it's going to be a Noah's *Ark* voyage I will before it's over," he answered, feeling the stubble of beard on his face.

"But you won't be six hundred years old, No. 44. That's what Noah was. And it says he lived three hundred and fifty years after he got ashore. You got quite a spell ahead of you. Where do you guess we'll find Ararat?"

"Somewhere outside of Pickerel Bay, I hope."

He picked up one of the paddles and began pushing out of the little cove. As they floated clear of the island Sadie looked back wistfully.

"'And *The Ark* went upon the face of the waters,'" she quoted solemnly.

Stoddard looked at her with new interest.

"You've been doing some reading, Sadie," he commented. "Also, some remembering. How much can you quote?"

"Just little bits, in spots," she answered. "I've read it all, once over. But there's parts of it I've read lots of times — the parts with adventures in 'em."

"Adventures?"

"Sure. Why, it's just full of grand adventures, No. 44! It's got fights and battles and explorin' and lots of excitin' things. They never had no trouble about outdoors in them days. It must've been pretty good times, livin' with all the trimmin's."

As *The Ark* reached deep water Stoddard, with a final thrust of his long-handled paddle against the bottom, slewed the bow gently around till it pointed in the direction of the South Arm. The wind was

not dead astern, but he figured that it would serve. This proved to be the case, for the raft gathered way gradually and set off at a drifting pace parallel to the shore of the island.

Pickerel Bay was pleasantly rippled by the breeze. On such a surface Stoddard had no fears for the stability of their craft. The sail of balsam-boughs "leaked" far more wind than it held, but, despite its shortcomings, it furnished steerage-way, and by cautious paddling he accelerated their speed a trifle. Soon the last point of the island slipped past them.

"Good-by, friend," said Sadie with a wave of her hand. "Comin' again some day."

She was proud of *The Ark* and anxious that it should acquit itself with credit, not because it meant a way to freedom, but for the reason that it was born of her own suggestion, and she thus felt a peculiar responsibility for it. As to the freedom part, she was not sure that it lay ahead of them. Their island had seemed wonderfully like freedom to Sadie.

"If this breeze holds," Stoddard told her, "we'll make as far as the South Arm by sundown."

"Then what?"

"Depends on circumstances. If things are going well we may be able to make right on for the hotel."

"And me in this outfit," commented Sadie dubiously as she surveyed her costume. Two days on the island, combined with several hours of raft-building, had played sad havoc with the suit that had been so new and stylish when she left Buffalo.

"They'll fix you out with clothes," he assured her.

"Think they can fit me?"

Now that he thought of it Stoddard was doubtful. Women like Sadie were rare in the Deepwater. For that matter, they were rare anywhere, so far as his experience was concerned.

After a little while she wanted to paddle, but he shook his head. He did not care to risk the balance of *The Ark*, nor was he sure that the fabric would hold together if the vigorous arms of Sadie added to his own efforts. She was disappointed, but he promised to teach her to paddle a canoe some day, whereupon she brightened and launched into a fusillade of questions concerning navigation in the woods-country.

"And I'll learn to go over waterfalls, too, like you when I first seen you," she declared.

"I believe you could," he said thoughtfully, his glance appraising her for the hundredth time.

"Do you suppose I could ever be a guide, like you told me about?" she asked presently.

"I never heard of a woman guide, Sadie."

"There ain't a law against it, is there?"

"No, I don't think there is."

"Because I'd like it better than washin' dishes, No. 44. I'd feel like I was really doin' something."

"Guides wash dishes," he informed her.

"Maybe. But they do other things, too. Big things!"

She threw her arms wide in a gesture, as if she would embrace and hold fast forever this outdoors

that had come to her so magically from the land of her dreams.

"I want to live where I can have all of it!" she exclaimed. "I want the woods and the water and all the sunlight. And I want the nights when I can see the stars shinin' through the trees, and it's all still and sort of creepy and sets you tinglin'. And the wind blowin' through the leaves, 'stead of comin' in through windows. And — and — Oh, I just got to have it — all!"

In her face, uplifted to the sky, Stoddard seemed to see her very soul. Her words, the unconscious pose of her outstretched arms, stirred him. Deep in her gray eyes were happiness and yearning and exaltation.

Suddenly, as if for a little she had been oblivious to his presence, she dropped her arms and looked at him with an embarrassed smile.

"I can't say it right, No. 44. And some of it seems as if it shouldn't be said, except like sayin' prayers. But it's here"— she laid her hand on her breast —" and I feel it — always!"

"I know," he said, nodding. "Sometimes I feel it, too."

"And you wouldn't give it up, would you?" she demanded eagerly.

"No; I wouldn't."

"Why, you couldn't!" she exclaimed. "Nobody could, when they feel it."

The Ark moved methodically onward. A mile astern lay the island, green and placid in the light of

the afternoon sun, save for a spot, that blazed scarlet, half-hidden in the verdure. Sadie pointed.

"It's a maple, turning early," he explained. "The rest will follow by and by."

"I bet it's as proud as a girl springin' the first new style in town," was her comment.

"Then you know how it feels," he laughed.

"No-o; not exactly. Guess you don't know much about new styles. They're high, first; then they get cheaper and everybody gets 'em. By the time they get to you — I mean me — everybody has 'em and the swells are wearin' new ones. You don't never quite catch up, but it's kind of excitin' tryin' to."

"Trying to catch Kitty and Estelle," he added.

"Who?"

"I was just using an illustration."

"I get you. But who are they?"

Sadie did not know that she was frowning slightly.

"Two girls back in New York."

"Friends of yours?"

"Oh, yes."

"Lookers?"

"Why — Kitty is."

"And the other one?" she demanded.

"Not so much, although some people think so."

"Rich?"

"They're supposed to be. Estelle is, anyhow."

"Swells?"

"They're pretty strong for society."

"Good dressers?"

"I guess so. I don't know much about that."

Sadie glanced down at her cheap skirt, now shorn of its new smartness. She sighed softly. She knew how tawdry she must seem in the eyes of No. 44.

She wished he had not told her of Kitty and Estelle. Of course, she understood that the girls he knew were very different from herself; that the people of his world were not those of hers.

But, even though she knew that it was false and shadowy, she had been cherishing an illusion; now it had gone from her abruptly. She saw herself once more as she knew he must see her.

Stoddard, watching her, understood.

"Sadie," he said, smiling faintly, "you're worrying because you think I'm comparing you to Kitty and Estelle. You're afraid I'll think you're not well enough dressed. You're —"

"Stop readin' my mind, No. 44," she interrupted.

"I never compare you to Kitty and Estelle; I always contrast you," he explained. "You can't make a comparison in a case like that. And it wouldn't do for you to dress as they do, Sadie."

"Why not?"

There was a note of resentment and defiance in her voice.

"Because, Sadie, it wouldn't be fair to Kitty and Estelle. What would they do, then?"

Slowly she reddened as she caught his meaning. She did not dare look at him. For the moment she wished she was quit of their little *Ark;* she wanted to run. Something made her shy and timid when he said things like that.

She knew he was looking down at her, probably

at her hair, because her face was hidden from him. He was always looking at her hair. She was distressed over its disorder.

She wondered if she ought to say anything. What was a girl expected to do? She was painfully — delightfully — embarrassed.

"I guess I got to thank you for that, No. 44," she whispered finally. "It's all right now — about the clothes."

Stoddard had it on his lips to say more. This woman in front of him was beautiful, and in a wondrous way that was utterly new to him. Why not tell her so? Why was such speech only for the ears of the other kind? Yet he hesitated; then shook his head.

"If I tell her the truth," he thought, "we'll both be so flustered that we'll want to jump off the raft. Beside, it would take too long."

The Ark was moving faster, under the impulse of a wind that freshened. Sadie, to spare herself from meeting his glance, turned about on her box and peered through the interstices of the balsam-sail, watching the bluff-point ahead that marked the entrance to Pickerel Bay. Stoddard remembered that he had half a pipeful of tobacco, carefully plugged into the bowl with a wad of paper. He decided to smoke it. Kneeling on the raft, he crouched to shield a match from the wind.

A minute later, when his pipe was drawing safely, he looked up. Slowly an expression of amazement spread over his face.

Sadie had been sitting less than ten feet away.

Now she was fifty feet away, still perched on her box and still intent upon the course ahead.

There were two rafts instead of one.

Stoddard leaped to his feet, perilously rocking his half of the dismembered *Ark,* and shouted.

Sadie turned, gasped and started to stand up.

"Down! Sit down!" he yelled as the forward section of *The Ark* also tipped and swayed.

Sadie obeyed at once.

"Sit perfectly still!" he called. "Wait till I get there."

He seized one of the clumsy paddles and fell to work. The logs under his feet squirmed and strained at their lashings, threatening to fly apart as the result of his exertions. The afterpart of *The Ark* was almost square and balked steadily at attempts to navigate it. Stoddard found it as reluctant to make progress in any single direction as a tub. He tried sculling from the stern, and found that this threatened to split the frail platform into further divisions.

Sadie called to him; he glanced over his shoulder. She was more than a hundred feet distant now.

"Don't be scared!" he shouted. "I'll get there."

He bent anew to the task of trying to reunite the pieces of *The Ark.* The blade of his paddle, nailed flimsily to the shaft, dropped off and floated astern. He turned to seize the other paddle, but found none. It was with Sadie.

The distance since he had last looked was nearly doubled. Sadie's half of *The Ark* was sailing

serenely on, its speed accelerated by lightened weight.

"Take down the sail!" he cried to her.

She turned and began tearing the thatch of balsam into fragments. She made short work of it, but the halves of the sundered *Ark* were a hundred yards apart by the time she had accomplished it.

Stoddard paddled desperately with a bare stick, but might as well have been using his fingers. Apparently he could not gain an inch on Sadie; in fact he lost more ground, because the forepart of the raft had not yet yielded all of the momentum supplied by the sail.

"I'll try to paddle to you!" called Sadie.

"No! Don't touch it! You may upset."

The platform upon which Stoddard stood showed further signs of disintegrating. The withes that fastened the logs together loosened till he found himself in the position of a man trying to ride two horses. Only with a great effort could he keep the structure from splitting completely apart.

Rather earnestly he cursed himself for hasty and faulty building. He wondered now, as he saw the lashings loosen one by one, how *The Ark* had managed to hold together as long as it did. Eventually he was forced to abandon all efforts to propel himself toward Sadie and, instead, had to devote his entire attention to keeping his precarious craft together.

Sadie meanwhile was sitting perfectly quiet, as ordered. She was not alarmed. On the contrary the episode furnished her with some amusement, for

occasionally she laughed at the frantic efforts of Stoddard to bring them together. She sat on her box with her hands folded, calling encouragement to him. She hoped he was not aware of her mirth.

Only one thing prevented him from swimming to join her — his knowledge that Sadie's half of *The Ark* would not be sufficient to sustain both of them. He could easily reach her, but would have to content himself with clinging to the edge, his body in the water, and he could see nothing to be gained by such a maneuver.

It was near sunset. The vagaries of the breeze were increasing the distance between them. The forward- and afterparts of *The Ark* appeared to have an antipathy for each other. They resisted all efforts to a union.

Stoddard realized that their situation was ridiculous; yet he saw a serious side, too, for if nightfall found them thus he would be greatly worried about Sadie. Before that event happened, however, he resolved that he would swim to her, so as to be near her. Perhaps, too, by clinging to her platform and kicking vigorously he might guide the way to shore again.

Sadie was calling again. He looked up. She had half risen from her seat and was pointing at something in another direction. Close to the point ahead was a canoe, moving slowly.

Stoddard made a megaphone of his hands and bellowed a series of hails, whereat Sadie took up the cry in long, musical "*Whoo-ooo!*" that carried far beyond his deeper notes.

The canoe, distant from them nearly a mile, seemed to hesitate, then increased its pace. Stoddard caught a series of yellow flashes as the golden sun, now low over the hills, played upon the wet blade of a paddle.

"All right, Sadie!" called Stoddard. "He's coming!"

The forepart of *The Ark* lay between Stoddard and the canoe, so that Sadie would be first to be rescued. Stoddard sat down contentedly on his craft, spreading his legs wide to hold the logs together.

Sadie beheld a birch-bark canoe cutting through the little waves at surprising speed. She was even more astonished to discover, when it drew near, that the paddle was being plied by a "shrimp"—a little, thin, dark man, with extraordinarily black eyes.

"An Injian!" she whispered to herself as the bark craft drew alongside.

He gave her no salutation, but merely laid hold of the logs to steady his canoe and nodded to her to step in. She obeyed cautiously, for the bark vessel seemed to be singularly frail, even though it floated buoyantly. Pushing away from *The Ark* without a second glance at it, the Indian resumed his paddle and headed in the direction of Stoddard.

As the latter climbed into the canoe the afterpart of *The Ark,* relieved of his weight, quietly resolved itself into scattered drift-wood. Stoddard grinned at Sadie, and she in turn laughed at him.

"Got any tobacco, John?" he demanded, addressing the Indian.

CHAPTER XV

"OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN —"

IT was sunset as the canoe bearing the trio swung into the open water of the South Arm. Sadie, sitting amidships and facing the bow, had completely forgotten her recent adventure. She was giving all her attention to the Indian, John, who had exchanged places with Stoddard and was now wielding the forward paddle.

The redman did not look noble in Sadie's eyes; he was too small, and he did not dress as does the aboriginee of the movies. It was the manifest power that came out of his almost emaciated body that astonished her, just as it had always puzzled Stoddard himself. John was a paddling machine, efficient and tireless.

Stoddard laid the bow of the canoe on a line for the Deepwater Hotel, now visible, at some three-miles' distance. He called Sadie's attention to the fact. She made no comment, but sighed. To her the hotel seemed to stand for the end of the story.

John presently ceased at his labor and faced about. Not once had he made an inquiry concerning Sadie or the plight in which he found both her and Stoddard, nor did he now. He merely asked:

"Hotel?"

"Yes; for the lady," answered Stoddard.

"You see folks," nodded John.

"She has no folks here."

"Your folks," corrected the Indian.

"Mine?"

"Sure."

"My folks are not here either, John."

"Yes; at hotel," remarked John.

"What!"

"Sure; come this morning."

"Cæsar's ghost! Are you sure?"

"Two women," added John.

"You mean my mother — and sister?"

The Indian nodded; then started to resume paddling. Stoddard checked him abruptly.

"Hold on! Wait a minute. I want to think," he called. "Did you see them yourself?"

"Come to camp in launch," explained the Indian. "This afternoon."

Stoddard, dismayed, began a rapid fire of questions. He learned that his mother and Betty had arrived at Deepwater that morning to make a brief stop on their way westward.

They had visited the camp on the Northeast Arm, to find only Stoddard's camp-mate, Larry Livingston, and the Indian there. Larry was in a fret of indignation over his desertion by Stoddard. He had no explanation to offer. Neither had John.

The ladies had made a brief visit and promised to return. Following their departure, John had set out on a hunt of his own for the missing one.

Sadie was no less dismayed than Stoddard himself as she assimilated the news. No. 44's folks were at the hotel, whither she was now bound, and she would meet them — arrayed thus!

The prospect terrified her. It was an issue she lacked the hardihood to meet. She turned to Stoddard appealingly.

"Take me somewhere else," she pleaded. "I can't meet 'em this way. I got to get some clothes."

She did not realize the boon her words bestowed upon Stoddard. He also had been reflecting swiftly upon the impossibility of introducing Sadie to the same hotel at which his mother and Betty were staying, not because he was ashamed of her, not because her dress was torn and soiled, not because her hair was flung loose to the wind, as if she were a wild woman, but because — well, because he could not invent a way to account for her.

He clutched at the opportunity Sadie offered.

"You really think you wouldn't care to meet them until you're fixed up a little?" he asked.

"Why, I just can't." she exclaimed. "I'd die!"

"Then I don't see anything to do for the present but to take you to camp," he observed.

To Sadie the suggestion was blessed relief.

"Take me there!" she urged. "I ain't fit to go anywhere else."

Stoddard, with a feeling that disaster had again been miraculously averted, quickly changed their course, and the canoe began the journey to the island where Larry Livingston was worrying, fuming, and cursing all the Fates.

There was ample time for thought now, but Stoddard could not manage to see far enough into the future for satisfactory planning. Sadie would have to meet Larry, of course, while some sort of explanation would also be required. Nevertheless he was resolved to tell no more than he could avoid. Larry would neither appreciate nor understand; furthermore, it was really none of Larry's business. This was his affair — and Sadie's.

He was dazed at the turn of fortune that had brought his mother and Betty to the Deepwater. When he left New York there had been talk of their joining a party to travel from coast to coast by private car, probably through Canada, but there had been no suggestion of such a visit as this, which was evidently the result of whim or sudden change of plans.

"I bet you'll be glad to see 'em," observed Sadie.

"I never wanted to see them less," he declared earnestly.

"Why, No. 44! That don't sound good."

"Can't help it. This country is no place for them. And besides —"

He hesitated, embarrassed by the thought in his mind.

"Well, they shouldn't have come without sending word."

"You got to make allowances for us women," mused Sadie philosophically. "I came kinda sudden myself, even if I did telegraph."

It was dark when the canoe rounded into the

Northeast Arm. Far ahead of them they caught the gleam of a camp-fire.

"Larry is certainly piling on the wood," commented Stoddard.

"Got plenty," John assured him. "I cut it."

The figure of a man silhouetted itself against the blaze as they drew close to the island, then advanced to the landing place to meet the approaching canoe.

"That you, Stod?" called a voice.

"Yes. Hello, Larry."

"Where in blazes have you been?"

"Fishing, swimming, hunting," replied Stoddard nonchalantly. "How are you?"

"Safe enough — no thanks to you!" growled Livingston. "That's a nice trick to play on a fellow. Do you know your mother is here?"

"John told me. Is she well?"

"Seems to be. But I didn't know what the deuce to say about you."

"Mother knows I can take care of myself," laughed Stoddard as the canoe touched the rock. "She's used to having me go off on sudden expeditions."

He stepped ashore and reached a hand to Sadie. As her stalwart figure rose out of the canoe Livingston, unaware till then of her presence because of the gloom, uttered a cry of surprise.

"Miss Hicks, this is my friend, Mr. Livingston," said Stoddard calmly.

It was Sadie who managed to find Livingston's hand and give it a cordial grasp.

"Glad to meet you," she said.

Larry was speechless. Bending forward for a better view of this unexpected arrival, he discovered himself looking upward into her eyes.

Sadie had been prepared by Stoddard for an unfavorable impression of his friend, and she found herself making a swift classification of him according to her inevitable standards of stature. He was not much better than she expected.

"Miss Hicks?" Larry echoed when he recovered voice.

"Yes; Miss Hicks," affirmed Stoddard.

"But who — what —"

"Miss Hicks is a friend of mine," pursued Stoddard. "She is from Buffalo. This is her first trip to Canada. She has come here to accept a position."

"Here?" Livingston's tone betrayed amazed incredulity.

"No; not exactly here," laughed Stoddard. "That is, if you mean on this island. But she has come to Deepwater. I went to meet her two nights ago, to take her down to the hotel, where she expects to stop for a while."

Sadie was listening to this bland recital of her plans with almost as much wonder as Larry himself.

"We were caught in the storm, unfortunately," Stoddard continued, "and Miss Hicks had the bad luck to lose her baggage. In fact we also lost the canoe. We were forced to make a temporary camp. John found us a couple of hours ago. Anything ready to eat?"

Livingston merely stood and stared, first at Sadie, then at his friend.

"But I don't understand, Stod. Why didn't—"

"Listen, son! I asked if you had anything to eat. That's more important to Miss Hicks and myself just now than anything else."

"Why, yes; of course! John can get you something."

He turned to Sadie, who had not spoken since acknowledging Stoddard's introduction.

"You see, Miss Hicks," Larry began, "I was not expecting company, and—"

"Sure you wasn't," interrupted Sadie. "I know. I ain't company anyhow. I'm just a butter-in. But if you got a sandwich handy, Mr. Livingston, I certainly can use it."

Larry gasped anew. He fell back a step, as if pushed by some invisible force. He did not know whether he heard aright. Stoddard, sensing his dismay and fearful that he would reveal the cause of it, grasped him by the arm and urged him toward the camp-fire, where John was already busy at the grub-sacks.

"We'll eat first and talk afterward," he said.

"My middle name is Food," observed Sadie solemnly, as she followed the pair into the firelight.

Stoddard, despite his assumed manner of ease, was disturbed and greatly puzzled. He could not put a seal upon Sadie's lips nor upon Larry's ears. Nor could he, in Sadie's presence, make the slightest explanation to Larry of her manner of speech and of her very evident limitations of education. From

his own experience he knew how her words sounded to the ears of his friend, and, although he was now somewhat accustomed to Sadie's lapses, he realized that to Larry they would be a source of amazement and shock.

As she stood close to the blazing logs Livingston viewed her with eyes in which there was an expression of horror and awe. The disorder of her costume appalled him. Her stature, her figure, her flying hair, seemed to stun him. She was like a young savage; magnificent, in a wild way, but uncouth, untutored and, from the conventional view-point of Larry, impossible.

Sadie in turn inspected Livingston with placid yet appraising glances. Little men she did not like, save that she was conscious of a very recent and odd exception. This was in the person of Indian John. Physically John was in every way to be catalogued with shrimps she had seen and met.

But John, because of the fact that he was fitly a part of her big outdoors, had mysteriously risen above his stature. She admitted, somewhat to the confusion of her ideals, that John was truly a man. She had heard No. 44 tell of his prowess; she herself had witnessed it. So she set John aside as an exception, to be correctly identified and classified later.

But Larry enjoyed no such dispensation in Sadie's eyes. He was merely a grade above the shrimp; he was a peewee. She had promised No. 44 to stretch a point and elevate him to the sparrow class, but as she viewed him now her conscience

smote her, for she knew that he was unworthy of such arbitrary promotion. Sadie's first impression of him, moreover, did not cease with physical contempt.

Something whispered to her that she was looking upon her natural enemy. She was as sure of this as if he had thus declared himself. Her judgments were often swift and usually intuitive, but she rarely found it necessary to reverse them. She was certain of Livingston. He fairly radiated hostility, in glance, in action and in speech, although not in words.

"He's against me," she told herself; "I got his number. Maybe he's No. 44's friend — but he ain't mine."

But because he was Stoddard's friend Larry did not awaken the spirit of battle within her. She was content to avoid him if she could. Should avoidance be impossible, then she would endure him. She would run no risk of offending No. 44.

The rescued pair were too busy repairing the ravages of short rations and venerable porcupine to do much talking. Between mouthfuls Stoddard furnished to Larry as much additional explanation concerning Sadie as he purposed giving. At times, when Larry looked at her, Sadie herself would confirm Stoddard's narrative with vigorous nods.

Only John seemed to be quite indifferent to the advent of this young Amazon in camp. He accepted her without curiosity or question, as he would anything that concerned Stoddard. If the big man had fetched an aëroplane into the woods, or an au-

tomobile, or had navigated the Deepwater in a submarine, John would not so much as blink an eye in surprise; not because Stoddard was given to eccentric feats, but because whatever he did had a solid reason behind it, in the opinion of the Indian.

Larry, upon whom Sadie's speech exercised a spell of horrid fascination, tried to draw her into conversation, without signal success. He viewed her reluctance to talk with suspicion. There was something irregular about it all, he decided; it was too utterly mysterious and unconventional.

He was amazed at Stoddard. How and whence such a creature had come into his friend's life he could not even faintly speculate. Covert inquiries and hints yielded little satisfaction.

"I never heard Stod happen to speak of you, Miss — er — Hicks," he remarked.

"I know lots of people I never happen to mention to you," broke in Stoddard hastily. "Sadie and I have known each other a long time."

He cast a swift glance at her as he spoke. Sadie took her cue. She felt that at least *she* had known Stoddard ever so long. She knew him far, far back, when she had begun dreaming of her outdoors.

"Sadie?" echoed Livingston involuntarily.

"Sure!" she laughed a little uneasily. "Jack and me are old friends."

Now that she had said it she was frightened. No. 44 would think it was brazen of her — calling him Jack! But she was desperately trying to play her part. She knew his name was John; he had signed it thus in his letter. Most of the Johns she

knew were called Jack by their "old friends." And, of course, it was out of the question to call him by the arithmetical name she had bestowed upon him, for that was something only she and No. 44 could understand.

She was flushing redly as she glanced at Stoddard across the camp-fire. He grinned at her and winked.

"You're from Buffalo?" suggested Livingston.

"I was in business there," answered Sadie with a magnificent air.

"What profession, may I ask, Miss Hicks?"

Sadie felt herself trapped. There was something pitiful in the swift look she gave Stoddard. His glance was on the tin plate that rested between his knees. Then she steeled herself as she turned to her accepted enemy.

"Packin' boxes in a shirt factory," she said in a steady voice.

There! It was out, and she felt better. She knew it was of no avail to play the educated lady; it was a part far beyond her powers.

"And," she added sweetly, meeting Larry's eyes fairly, "I expect to be washin' dishes in the hotel as soon's the management and me reaches an agreement."

Stoddard was looking at her now. Her heart gave an extra beat when she found no pity in his eyes. Instead she saw admiration. He smiled at her, too, and nodded.

"You see, Larry," he said, "Sadie has decided, very wisely, to quit the city. She likes to be outdoors, so I offered to help her get a position. We

have discussed the whole matter quite fully, and we both agree she is doing the right thing. Don't we, Sadie?"

"Yes, Jack."

It slipped out that time, but she was no longer frightened at the sound of it.

Livingston relapsed into silence. It was worse than he believed. A creature from a factory! He wondered if Stoddard was entirely sane.

As for the girl, there was no doubt of her sanity. She was shrewd and calculating, he felt, beyond all question. She was seizing an opportunity not to be missed. He secretly commiserated with his friend, who was too blind to see or understand.

The faint *putt-putt* of a motor-launch came across the water. Stoddard inclined his ear toward the sound.

"That'll be your mother and sister, I imagine," said Larry with affected carelessness.

"To-night!" Stoddard fairly shouted the word.

"They said they'd probably run up this evening if it was clear and pleasant," explained Larry. "They thought you might be back, and as they expect to leave to-morrow they won't have much time to see you."

Stoddard had risen to his feet and was looking at Sadie. He felt panic struggling within him. So did Sadie, who also arose and faced him.

"Yes; come to-night," volunteered John as he nodded toward the now clearer noise of the power-boat's exhaust.

"I can't see anybody in these clothes!" blurted Sadie. "Not ladies."

"You'd rather wait?" suggested Stoddard.

"Gracious, yes!"

Livingston looked at the pair cynically and smiled in a shadowy way. They paid no attention to him.

"I can understand how you feel, Sadie," said Stoddard, yet ashamed of his sudden timorousness. "You don't have to see them now, of course."

"Hide me!" commanded Sadie briefly.

"There's the tent," suggested Larry.

"Nix," said Sadie shortly. "I know women. If they see it closed up they'll go straight to it. Take me somewhere else."

Seizing her arm Stoddard walked her rapidly across the little clearing into the woods. A dozen feet beyond the rim of the trees was utter darkness; at least to the eyes of persons who stood in the firelight. He felt guilty and contemptible as he groped about until he found a rock upon which Sadie could sit.

"It doesn't seem right," he began. "But you understand—"

"Why, I want to be hid!" exclaimed Sadie. "I wouldn't have women see me in this outfit for a thousand jobs. I'll just sit here till they go. They won't stay all night, will they?"

"Certainly not. It's good of you not to mind, Sadie."

"Why, I'm doin' myself a favor!"

He hesitated; then his hand found hers in the dark.

"Don't mind Larry," he said in a low voice. "He doesn't understand. And that was brave of you, telling him about your work."

"Was it?" she whispered. "Thanks — Jack!"

Something soft and cool brushed the back of his hand as he turned to leave her. Sadie, secure from his eyes, had laid her cheek against it.

CHAPTER XVI

"WHY DID SADIE CRY?"

WHEN Stoddard reached the camp-fire Larry was starting for the landing-place to meet the arriving launch.

"Not a word, you understand," said Stoddard.

"About what?"

"About her." And he nodded toward Sadie's place of concealment.

"I don't see why," said Larry. "They're bound to hear of it sooner or later. It's too absurd to be kept concealed."

Stoddard gripped him by the arm.

"This is my affair," he said shortly. "It's my business to tell about it if I choose; nobody else's. You leave it alone."

"Piffle!" exclaimed Livingston lightly. "It's a good story."

"Well, you don't tell it, son." And Stoddard put a pressure on Larry's arm that made the latter wince. "Mind, now!"

"But suppose!"

"If you so much as drop a hint I'll pick you up and toss you into the lake. I mean that, too."

"Oh, all right, if you're so fussy about it! It's got you scared, has it? Ouch! You're hurting my arm. Let go!"

"Remember!" said Stoddard grimly, as he loosened his grip. "The lake for yours."

Out of the cool darkness came the launch, cautiously feeling her way to the rocky shore. Stoddard was awaiting her as the bow came within his reach. An instant later he was lifting his mother and Betty to the firm ground.

"And where in the world have you been?" exclaimed Mrs. Stoddard as she greeted her son affectionately. "Larry said you deserted him for two days."

"Oh, I was just prowling around in the canoe," said Stoddard. "Larry was all right. He had John. And how are you both? This is certainly springing a surprise on me."

With an arm around each he led Betty and his mother to the camp-fire, where John had spread a blanket over a log to serve as a bench for the visitors.

As Mrs. Stoddard now obtained a view of her big son she uttered a cry of dismay.

"For mercy's sake, John! What in the world have you been doing? You are a perfect fright!"

Stoddard grinned at her cheerfully.

"I'm not exactly dolled up for company," he admitted. "We don't pack evening duds up here, mother."

There was genuine horror in Mrs. Stoddard's eyes. Those of Betty had less of dismay in them, but an equal amount of astonishment. She had never seen her brother in the garb of a tramp, with

a torn shirt and a stubble of beard, and she was frankly interested in the spectacle.

"Here, sit down, the pair of you," urged Stoddard.

"Sorry we haven't got porch-chairs. Tremendously glad to see you, just the same. Want something to eat?"

Mrs. Stoddard glanced at a pile of tin plates and cups, and shuddered.

"We dined at the hotel," she said hastily.

"Then tell me all the news," commanded Stoddard. "How's New York? And what brings you here?"

"We came in your uncle's private car," said Mrs. Stoddard as she gingerly sat on the blanketed log. "We are going through to the Pacific Coast. He had some business near North Bay that was to keep him for a couple of days, so we decided to run up to see you."

"That's fine! Too bad I wasn't in this afternoon. Did Larry show you the camp?"

"We have seen it," replied his mother with a sigh as she drew her skirt about her ankles.

"Nice little island, isn't it?"

"I can't say that I appreciate it. Don't you get enough of this sort of thing, John, without deliberately choosing it as a vacation?"

"No," was the prompt answer.

"But it's so crude, so uncomfortable, so dirty! Ugh!"

"Why, it's as clean as a pin, mother! This is a spotless camp."

"Look at your hands, John! And your arms! Do you call them clean?"

"It's clean dirt," he said stoutly. "It hasn't any New York germs in it anyhow."

Mrs. Stoddard made a gesture of annoyance and inspected her gloved hands, whereon she promptly discovered smudges. She was a handsome woman, and to her son she never looked more attractive than now, with the ruddy light of the fire playing upon her fine features and her heavy coils of white hair. In the matter of costume she made no concessions to the Deepwater country. Her gown was from Paris, and looked it. Even Betty was a fashion-plate.

Stoddard surveyed the pair with amused eyes and began to smile.

"You'll have to pardon me, mother," he said, "but you look just as funny to me as I do to you, I imagine. We don't see clothes like that up here once in an age."

Mrs. Stoddard inspected her costume with anxious eyes.

"Betty and I did not know we were leaving civilization," she answered.

"Otherwise you wouldn't have left at all," he laughed.

"More than likely. We certainly should not willingly have undertaken anything like this. We have been very comfortable aboard the car. But of course you know all about that yourself. I imagine we do look somewhat misplaced, but the visit was unexpected."

"I suppose you're something of a sensation at the hotel," he remarked.

"Sensation!" broke in Betty. "I should say we were! I never longed for a shirtwaist and a golf-skirt as I did to-day. We were positive curiosities!"

She looked down at her pumps and silken ankles with a rueful expression.

"But tell me about this trip," said Stoddard. "How long are you planning to be gone?"

"Three or four weeks probably," answered his mother. "It depends somewhat upon your uncle's business. We will meet the Wallaces at the coast, where they will join us."

"Estelle?" Stoddard smiled a trifle ironically as he mentioned the name of the society girl whom his mother wished him to marry.

"Yes. With her father and mother. They are West now."

"And the Fitches?"

"They went abroad, you know. Kitty is with them."

"That's so; I'd forgotten."

"I wish we could have gone," complained Betty. "The West is so stupid, mother."

"Your uncle wanted us to go with him," said Mrs. Stoddard in a tone of resignation. "He has asked us so many times I felt that we simply could not refuse."

Larry Livingston had been holding aloof from the conversation. He acted like a man whose soul is burdened with discontent, as indeed his was. A

secret was in his breast, but he must not tell it, and this to Larry was a form of cruel and unusual punishment. Often Larry's glance wandered toward the place where Sadie was hidden among the trees, and when Stoddard intercepted it on one occasion he frowned heavily and shook his head in warning.

"Tell Jack about Mrs. Westfall, mother," suggested Betty.

"You know the Westfalls, John?" said Mrs. Stoddard.

"Don't think I do. I've heard the name."

"Mrs. Westfall went to school with Betty. We don't see much of her now, of course; they live over in New Jersey somewhere. But she is at the hotel here."

"Sensible woman," commented Stoddard.

"Well, *she* doesn't think so. She has just been through a most terrible experience and says she never wants to see the country again. Why, it was a positively unheard-of thing! It makes me nervous every time I think of it, and I shall not be in peace of mind until we have left. Have you heard about the lunatic?"

"Where? Here?"

"Right here at this place," said Mrs. Stoddard with an involuntary shiver.

Stoddard shook his head.

"Haven't met him," he observed. "Unless it's Larry. He carries on once in a while."

Livingston merely scowled.

"Well, Mrs. Westfall had a most harrowing experience," said Mrs. Stoddard. "The poor little

thing is still upset over it. You know, her husband, Dick Westfall, and her brother have been here for several weeks, camping. She came on to join them. She arrived two or three evenings ago, and they were late in getting to the train.

"The thing happened at the station. It's unbelievable! It seems that she had no sooner gotten off the train than a wild man rushed up to her and began shouting something about a mistake having been made. Then he seized her by the arm and began dragging her along the platform. She was absolutely helpless. She was too frightened even to scream."

Mrs. Stoddard paused to shudder, while her son stared. So this was the girl he had hustled from the inbound to the outbound train, thinking she was Sadie!

"It seems there was another train at the station," said Mrs. Stoddard, resuming. "He dragged her to this train and flung her aboard as it was starting. Then he threw her baggage after her and yelled something about writing. And then she was carried away!"

"Huh!" said Stoddard mechanically.

"It was a mercy, of course, that he did not strangle her. She was so utterly stupefied that she remained sitting on the car-platform until the conductor found her."

"And what became of her?" ventured Stoddard, trying to make his tone casual.

"That is another extraordinary part of it. The insane man had thrown into her lap an envelope.

When she opened it she found a railroad ticket to Toronto, a Pullman berth — and fifty dollars!"

"He must have been insane!"

"Beyond all question," declared Mrs. Stoddard emphatically.

"Does she describe him?" He spoke in a whisper.

"That's another difficulty. She cannot. She was too completely bewildered and terrified. She simply knows he was a large man, roughly dressed, and possessed of tremendous strength. That's all she can recollect."

"Didn't anybody else see him?" apprehensively.

"They haven't found anybody yet. But they are looking, of course."

"Where are they looking?"

"All over," broke in Livingston. "There were a couple of men here this afternoon after your mother left. Forest rangers, they said they were. They wanted to know if I had seen anything of an escaped lunatic, and said there were a lot of men out in the woods looking for him."

Stoddard's face went blank as this intelligence reached his ears.

"Mr. Westfall is offering a reward," added Mrs. Stoddard. "They have already brought two or three men down to the hotel to see if Mrs. Westfall could identify them, but she was quite sure none of them was the man.

"They say they will be able to get him before long. But until they do everybody is terribly excited and frightened. Imagine a creature like that

at large! Why, he might be hiding on this very island — now!"

"And what happened to Mrs. Westfall after the conductor found her?" Stoddard risked, controlling his voice with an effort.

"She couldn't get a train back that night, so she went clear through to Toronto. Meantime she telegraphed her husband, and he went down and brought her up here. She didn't want to come at all, poor thing. But they needed her here in case they caught the man, so she could identify him."

"I see," said Stoddard slowly.

His brain was whirling, but he managed to keep an appearance of outward calm. The rangers were looking for him! He was a hunted man!

"Weren't they able to get any clue at the station?" he asked.

"Nothing that has helped, it appears. The ticket-agent at Deepwater doesn't remember who bought the ticket and the berth."

Stoddard wondered if they had questioned Billy Mason, the station-master. If so Billy, who was a friend of his, had clearly been shielding him, for Billy knew of Stoddard's actions, and he was the only one who did. But Billy's silence merely added to the seriousness of the thing. If Billy had chosen to shield, rather than to explain, he must have had grave reasons.

"But what are they going to do to this man if they get him?" he asked. "Is it a crime to put a woman on a train and give her a ticket and money?"

"I am sure I don't know whether it is a crime or

not," said his mother. "That, of course, has nothing to do with it. The man is wanted so he can be sent back to whatever asylum he escaped from."

"That's so; I was forgetting he was a nut."

"I wish you wouldn't use such words, John," said Mrs. Stoddard, frowning.

"All right, mother; I'll call him a bug. And how much reward is Westfall offering?"

"It's only a hundred dollars, but they say it looks as large as a thousand to most of the men who are out hunting for the creature."

Stoddard knew that was true. For a hundred dollars they would comb the Deepwater country to its uttermost recesses. It was a temptation even to Billy Mason, who was obviously in a position to collect the reward if he wished. He decided he would have to see Billy himself; he might, in fact, have to pay the reward — privately.

"All of the men at the hotel," volunteered Betty, "are going armed, and the rangers are carrying guns, too."

"It's against the law!" Stoddard exclaimed.

"Well, they say it is different in this case. That while it is against the law to shoot animals, it's all right to shoot a lunatic."

Betty looked up at her brother with an emphatic nod and added:

"He ought to be shot, too, and he probably will be, because they say he's so big and strong that it would take several men to capture him alive. I don't believe even you could manage him, Jack, and you're big enough, goodness knows! Dolly West-

fall says he has all the strength of an insane man."

"Is she an expert on lunatics?"

"A person doesn't have to be when somebody picks them up and throws them twenty or thirty feet aboard a rapidly moving train."

Stoddard opened his eyes wide.

"Did she say that?" he asked in an awed voice.

"I think Betty exaggerates a little," explained his mother. "But it was a very perilous experience, and, coming right after an attack of nervous prostration, it was enough to frighten any woman to death."

"I'm sorry," murmured Stoddard, absent mindedly.

"Sorry!" echoed Betty. "Why should you be sorry?"

"Sorry for Mrs. Westfall, I mean," he exclaimed hastily. "It's too bad to have her get such an impression of the country on her first trip."

"Is it her first trip, mother?" asked Betty. "I didn't remember her saying that."

Stoddard chewed his lip in dismay at his clumsiness. He suddenly remembered that this bit of information had come from Sadie, who learned it first-hand from the stranger on the train.

"I don't recall that she mentioned it was her first trip," said Mrs. Stoddard. "Did I say so, John?"

"I thought you did," he answered. "Maybe I misunderstood you."

"Well," declared Betty after a brief pause, during which she studied the rugged figure of her

brother, "if I were a man I wouldn't waste time being sorry. I'd get a gun and go out and shoot the lunatic. Have you a gun, Jack?"

"Never carry one up here. It's foolishness."

"You won't think so if you meet a maniac and you're all alone in the woods. Ugh!"

"He is not likely to meet him," remarked Mrs. Stoddard quietly. "Not unless he sees him to-night."

Stoddard looked at his mother for an explanation.

"We are expecting you to join our party to-morrow," she added.

"Oh, out of the question!" he exclaimed. "Impossible, mother!"

"But why? We planned it as part of the surprise."

"Why?" he repeated. "Why, because —"

He thought of the girl hidden in the woods a few yards distant.

"Because I'm up here for the woods, that's why. And I'm carrying out the doctor's prescription for Larry. That's another reason."

"But Larry has said he will go with us."

Stoddard turned a baleful look upon Livingston.

"Did you?" he demanded.

"Why not?" said Larry. "It'll be a lot more fun than this."

"But your doctor —"

"A lot that worries you, Stod. You disappear forty-eight hours at a time and then preach about having to take care of me."

"Well, you had John."

"That makes no difference. Anyhow, I'm not strong for this primitive-man business. I've had enough of it."

"Larry is sensible," affirmed Mrs. Stoddard, nodding.

"Larry's an idiot," observed her son. "But of course he can go if he wants to."

"I'm not keen about running into this wild man from Borneo," said Livingston. "I'm no hero."

"I guess that private car sounds good to you, Larry. Go ahead. But I'm going to stay here."

Mrs. Stoddard was plainly annoyed.

"Be reasonable, my son," she said as patiently as she could. "We have counted on you to come and we shall be greatly disappointed if you refuse. Betty has already written to the Wallaces that we expect you. And as I mentioned before Estelle will be with them."

She watched the effect of this; then resumed:

"We shall be short of men if you don't come. Estelle will be looking for you. You always did like Estelle, John."

"Sure; she's a nice girl," he responded perfunctorily. "But you've got Larry now. He can look after Estelle."

Betty knitted her forehead. She was not entirely sure about that.

"It's going to be a beautiful trip," continued Mrs. Stoddard, "and the Wallaces are delightful people. Your uncle suggested that we bring you. He's expecting you."

"He'll be disappointed, then. I can't go, mother."

"But why?"

"Because I came up here for the woods."

"But what is there to keep you here?"

"The woods."

Mrs. Stoddard tried to cover her exasperation. Already she scented defeat; she knew of old her son's will.

"It's a reason that does not appeal to me, I admit," she said as her glance swept about the camp. "Surely you get enough of this, John, when your business calls you! Sometimes you're away from us for a year and more.

"I should think you'd be utterly weary of it. But now that you have leisure you must run straight into your woods again. There isn't a thing to keep you here except your own whim. Your business doesn't call you here; there is nothing whatever to compel you to stay."

Stoddard mumbled something about the woods and shrugged his big shoulders. He never had been able to make his mother understand; and now that she had viewed his much-praised Deepwater without discovering the reason he had no hope that she would ever see it. There was another reason, too — concealed in the darkness beyond the rim of the firelight; that also was something she would not understand.

"Let's drop it, mother," he said. "I can't go."

Mrs. Stoddard and her daughter exchanged glances and sighed.

"Betty," said her mother, "you must telegraph Estelle in the morning."

Stoddard shot a look of inquiry.

"Estelle was coming part of the way to meet us," explained Mrs. Stoddard. "But now —"

She made a dainty gesture of despair.

"Oh!" said her son.

For some time he had been aware that his mother was tentatively mapping the future of Estelle Wallace in conjunction with his own, and he had regarded the occupation with tolerant amusement. Now it was obvious she was beginning to embellish her chart with details. He loved his mother; he admired her tremendously; he hated to disappoint her. But Stoddard was the cartographer of his own destinies.

"You go down on the evening train to-morrow?" he asked.

"Probably. Our car is on the siding here. It is possible, though, that your uncle may arrange for a special engine, in which case we may go earlier."

Betty, who had begun to yawn, suggested that it was time to start back for the hotel. As she arose from her seat her brother slipped an arm around her shoulders and whispered:

"Get mother to cut that Estelle business out, Bet."

"I'm mad at you," said Betty petulantly. "You're mean! And you are soiling my gown with those horrid hands."

He laughed, hugged her close to his grimy clothes, and kissed her.

As they were reëmbarking Mrs. Stoddard told Larry that they would call for him on the morrow, for they would use the special launch to take them to Deepwater Station. Her disappointment at the failure to lure her son away from the woods did not prevent her from bidding him a warm good-by. Although he often exasperated her she was gloriously proud and fond of him.

Back in her sylvan refuge Sadie sat listening to the steadily waning sound of the motor-boat exhaust. She was glad the darkness hid her, for she had been crying.

She had seen and she had heard, and her mind was troubled. She felt that something was aching within her breast. The big outdoors no longer seemed so friendly. The vision that had filled her with wonder was slipping away. It had been only a dream, after all.

She was stifling the last faint sob when Stoddard groped his way into the tangle and led her back to the camp-fire. She went slowly and reluctantly, and when he turned to look at her she averted her eyes.

"What's the matter, Sadie?" he asked.

"Nothing."

He turned her about so that the light fell upon her face.

"Why, Sadie! You've been crying!"

"I'm — I'm tired."

"You poor kid! Of course you are! It was a shame to leave you there so long."

"That's all right. You couldn't help it. I'm just tired."

Her body sagged wearily and her head drooped as Stoddard led her to the tent.

"Good night," he said. "You'll be all right to-morrow."

"I guess so," Sadie replied. "Good night."

Down by the fire he found an indignant Larry.

"You've given her the tent, have you?" he demanded.

"Why, certainly."

"And what about me?"

"You can curl up out here, as John and I are going to do," replied Stoddard shortly. "Don't be such a fusser, Larry. You'll be bunking in a sixty-thousand-dollar private car to-morrow night, with a porter to wait on you. Dream about that for a change."

Stoddard was in no mood for anything but thought. He was puzzled and disturbed. Sadie wasn't tired, he knew. Why did she cry?

CHAPTER XVII

LARRY TAKES A HAND

BREAKFAST was a silent and cheerless ceremony. John, the Indian, was taciturn from habit. Larry was surly because he had been deprived even of the poor luxury of the tent. Stoddard said little because his mind was still trying to fathom a troubling problem.

As for Sadie, she was in a mood utterly new to her — a mood which had the effect of placing a seal upon her tongue. It was a wrong way to eat breakfast when a September morning in the Deepwater is trembling and joyous with the promise of a wondrous day; but thus the meal passed.

Stoddard was watching Sadie furtively. Something was wrong, beyond all question; but while he sensed in a hazy way the cause of the trouble it presented no clear outlines to him. It had something to do with the visit of his mother and sister, he felt sure, but beyond that his diagnosis failed. Of her own choice Sadie had avoided a meeting; she had demanded to be hidden. He could not see, therefore, that her banishment into the woods during their call furnished a cause of offense.

Sadie avoided his eyes. Most of the time she stared steadily at the ground in front of her; occasionally she glanced out at the silver water; but

never, save by accident, did she meet Stoddard's look.

Breakfast over, she wandered slowly down to the water's edge, then followed the shore aimlessly. All the buoyancy seemed to have gone from her, for she walked in tired, listless fashion, her head bent forward, her arms swinging idly at her sides. Chirping birds and chattering chipmunks had no interest for her, nor did the freshness of the morning awaken her spirits as of old.

After an interval Stoddard followed. She was sitting with her back against a dead stump, close to the shore, when he first sighted her. Her eyes were half-closed; she appeared to be quite oblivious of her environment. He watched her for a moment; then approached quietly. Not until he had seated himself a few feet away did she glance at him, and then it was for the briefest interval.

"Let's have a talk, Sadie," he said.

She made no answer, but played with a strand of hair that lay across her lap.

"Something's gone wrong," he went on. "I understand that, of course. But I don't know just what it is. If it's my fault I want to apologize and tell you how sorry I am. What is it, Sadie?"

"It ain't anything," she answered dully.

"That's not frank. It has to be something. Let's have it out. You and I can't go on in this fashion, Sadie."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"We're too good pals for that," he added. "We can't have any misunderstandings. Tell me

what it is. Has it something to do with last night?"

"Maybe." She spoke reluctantly.

"Is it because you didn't meet my mother and Betty?"

She shook her head.

"You said you didn't want to, you know."

"It ain't that," she answered.

He waited a little for her to go on, but Sadie had again relapsed into brooding silence.

"Then what is it that makes you angry with me?"

"I ain't angry," she said hastily and with a note of alarm. "Honest I ain't."

"What, then?"

She looked at him appealingly.

"Oh, it ain't worth botherin' about, I guess," she murmured. "Only I ain't angry."

"You may as well tell me now," said Stoddard, "because I'm not going to leave until you do. So go ahead."

Sadie clasped her hands about her knees and studied a rock that jutted through the moss at her feet.

"I'm — I'm just hurt," she said slowly.

"About something that happened last night?"

She nodded.

"You heard us talking, I suppose?"

"That's it. I couldn't help hearin'. And I wish I hadn't."

"Go on, Sadie."

"It ain't easy to say," she faltered. "You been so kind to me I ain't got a right to complain. And

I ain't complainin', either. Only it seemed — Well, you didn't ever have a job in sight for me."

"That's true; I didn't. Go on."

"And you ain't got any way of gettin' me one, like I thought," she mused. "Because — well, because you ain't got any interests here. Your mother said that."

"Not the kind of interests you thought," he admitted.

"And, you see, that's the trouble," said Sadie. "You let me go on thinkin' different. And when I found out last night, why — "

She ended the sentence with a shrug.

"You felt I hadn't played fair. Isn't that it?"

"I won't say it wasn't fair," she answered. "I guess you did it to save my feelin's. You didn't want me to feel disappointed."

"That's true. But just the same I intended to do all I could — and still intend to, Sadie."

"It all comes, I guess, from misunderstandin' your letter," she went on after a pause. "You see, I didn't know you was just — just playin' up here. I thought you belonged. You oughta have told me when I came."

"It would have saved a misunderstanding," he admitted.

"Can I ask something?" she ventured.

"Of course."

"What was you thinkin' when you wrote that letter? I mean, about me?"

"I thought you were a girl with a beautiful dream."

"And you didn't want to wake me up."

"I suppose that's about it."

"But it was a case where I'd oughta been waked up."

She looked at him steadily for a minute, and when he remained silent she added:

"You woke up, but I didn't."

"How do you mean?"

"You woke up after you got my telegram. You were goin' to send me back. I heard about that, too. Your mother told about the woman at the station; I knew it was the one I met. And you thought she was me."

Stoddard nodded.

"I guess you had the right idea. You knew it was all a mistake and you figured to get me out of it quick. I ain't blamin' you. I ain't got a right to. Only —"

Involuntarily she laid a hand against her breast.

"—Only it just sort of hurts — to find it out."

He was silent. What could he say? Sadie at last understood what he had been trying to conceal from her. He might have known that the truth would discover itself eventually.

Stoddard felt ashamed, yet he was glad that the fiction had been wiped out. It was easier for Sadie in the end.

As he watched her he became conscious of a quickening of his pulse. The little droop at the corners of her mouth was new to him, and strangely attractive. It suggested sadness a little, but sweetness far more.

The pink of the dawn was in her cheeks, the glowing glory of the sunrise in her hair. There was a mist of tenderness and yearning in her eyes. She was wonderful, beautiful — and he had wounded her!

"What can I say, Sadie?"

She looked at him with a faint smile.

"I'll say anything — do anything — if you'll forgive me! I didn't mean to hurt you. Why, I couldn't hurt *you,* Sadie!"

"I know you meant it for the best," she murmured. "I was foolish. Only it did hurt."

"Yes; I can see it now. But it was all because I didn't know, until I found you that night at the station, that you were *you.* Don't you see that?"

"You mean —"

"I mean," he said, talking rapidly, "that everything changed then. You must know that. Why did I let you go on thinking about the job you were to get? Because I was afraid to hurt you. Why do you think I didn't send you back, after I did find you — as I sent the other woman?"

He saw the color slowly flooding her face and throat.

"Did you suppose I *could* send you back when I had seen you?"

Sadie was trembling. Her eyes would not meet his glance. She was frightened — and happy. She was afraid to listen — but her ears were strangely eager.

Now he was leaning forward and his great, brown hand had imprisoned one of hers.

"Sadie! Look at me!"

She would not. There was a tear glistening on her cheek.

"Why, Sadie!"

His voice had grown husky and his own hand was shaking. Revelation had come to Stoddard within the moment; it startled and thrilled him.

He was standing now and both her hands were in his as he slowly drew her to her feet. For a little they stood thus in silence. Then she slowly raised her head and looked at him bravely through brimming eyes.

"You wonderful —"

The sound of a footstep on the rocks checked his speech. Stoddard turned swiftly and saw Larry Livingston standing a few yards distant. With a little cry Sadie released her hands and fell back a step. Then she fled in sudden panic.

Stoddard glared at the intruder, who, with a shadowy smile on his lips, advanced.

"I beg your pardon," said Larry. "I didn't —"

"Oh, shut up!"

"It was entirely an accident, Stod."

"There's nothing to talk about," said Stoddard curtly.

"Clumsy of me, I know; but —"

"Go to the devil!"

Stoddard whirled about and strode in the direction of the camp.

Livingston watched him until a bend of the shore hid his figure from sight. He stood smiling for a

moment, then his face became serious. Larry was thinking.

Several times he frowned and shook his head. He glanced in the opposite direction. Sadie also had disappeared. For a little time Larry appeared hesitant.

"Useless to talk to him," he muttered. "But — oh, Lord!"

Then he began following the path Sadie had taken.

It was several minutes before he found her, down at the farther point of the island. She did not hear him until he was very close; then she glanced about timidly, but with the same light in her eyes as that which Stoddard had seen.

It faded in a flash when she recognized Larry, and in its place came a look of weariness and suspicion and defiance.

"Beautiful morning," he said tentatively.

Sadie, instinctively cautious, weighed this observation carefully before admitting that it was.

For a minute or two, Larry spoke commonplaces and received answers, when they were required, that consisted of monosyllables. Sadie knew he had not found her by accident. Behind the cloak of his perfunctory talk was something concealed, she instantly divined. His words were the mere patter of a stage magician manipulating his cloth.

Sadie was in no patient mood. She hated this friend of No. 44's and distrusted him, although she did not fear him. He was still aimlessly talking when she interrupted him sharply:

"Let's have it straight," she said. "What do you want to say to me?"

"Well, I don't want to offend you," he answered, studying her face narrowly, "but I wanted to say something about Stoddard."

"Well?"

"And you," he added, pausing to watch the effect.

"Say it, then."

Give Larry credit for this: He had the courage of his meddlesomeness.

"Stoddard is very fond of you," he said quietly.

"Did he say so?" Sadie controlled her voice with difficulty.

"Oh, no. I shouldn't think of discussing it with him. Certainly he would not mention it to me."

She did not need to be told that.

"I imagine that you are rather fond of him," Larry continued.

Sadie's face was flushed, more in anger than embarrassment. To her this was like vandalism in some sacred temple. But she checked the retort that was on her lips and waited. She wanted to understand more.

"I did not intentionally intrude a little while ago," said Larry, speaking smoothly. "I would like to have you know that."

She believed he lied, but made no comment.

"I understood even before then," he went on. "Now, of course, you may think this is something I have no right to talk about. But Stod is a friend of mine, so I've taken the liberty."

"I notice that. Go ahead."

"Thank you. I'm going to assume as a basis for what I say that you are very fond of Stoddard. Wait! I'm going to make it as short as possible and I'm not going to ask you to do anything but think about what I tell you. If you do care for him it does you credit. He is a fine fellow and he is worthy of anybody.

"Stoddard comes of a very old New York family. His people are not only wealthy, but their social position is exceptional. You have seen his mother and his sister. I think you understand without anything more being said in reference to that.

"Their world is the one in which he has been reared and to which he is accustomed. He is a man of education. He has already done brilliant work in his profession and he has a big future ahead of him. His family — his mother — worship him. They think more of his career, probably, than of any other thing in this world."

Livingston seemed to be at a loss to proceed.

"It's rather difficult to say what I had in mind."

"You mean about me?" asked Sadie steadily.

He nodded.

"You needn't say it if you don't want to. I understand. You mean I'm different from him. I'm ignorant. I don't talk right. I ain't got a social position. I'm a factory hand.

"That's all right; I know it. It's said now. Go ahead."

Larry sighed softly. The bridge had been crossed.

"None of those things are to your discredit in any way, you understand," he said. "I don't want you to think that."

"You can cut that stuff out," said Sadie quietly. "I ain't lookin' for sympathy. If I wanted to find it I'd get a dictionary. Just pass that and go on."

"Well, what I just wanted to put before you was this: Take a man like Stoddard, with all that he is and all that he can be. Take a girl — well, like yourself.

"Assume they love each other. Assume that this man should desire to marry this woman. Assume that he tells her so."

Sadie waited grimly. She knew it was shameful, this cold, impersonal vivisection of a thing that breathed with life and love, but she had steeled herself to hear him out.

"In that case," Livingston said slowly, "and assuming always that she had a real love for this man — and love means sacrifice — what would this woman do?"

He paused, but not as if he expected an answer from her.

"That's what I want you to think about," he added as he turned away. "Thank you for listening."

He walked steadily until he had gone from her sight, unhurried and methodically, like a man conscious of a duty properly performed.

An hour later Sadie was still sitting where he had left her. She was looking out across the water, where the bluff shores of the mainland lifted their

ragged summits against the sky, but she saw nothing of her big outdoors. She was looking only into her soul. Her eyes were calm and clear, her face peaceful. Now and then her lips moved without sound.

"What would this woman do?" they were saying.

Then:

"I know."

Back in the camp Livingston found Stoddard smoking in grim silence. He made no effort to draw him into conversation and Stoddard paid not the slightest attention to his presence.

The big man's mind was filled with a vision that his almost forbidding expression did not even faintly reflect. He looked angry and unhappy, but he was not. He was serious, but very content.

Something that had troubled and baffled him had suddenly become clear. The road was open and just beyond the turn was happiness. Presently he would overtake it. He could wait a little. What mattered an hour or so now, when a lifetime lay ahead?

Stoddard scarcely raised his eyes when Larry announced that the launch from the hotel was in sight, and he did not move from his place until it neared the landing. Then he arose slowly, knocked the ashes from his pipe, and went to meet his mother and Betty.

"They telephoned us from the station that your uncle has arranged for a special locomotive," said

Mrs. Stoddard as she greeted him. "So we are going now."

Larry, eager to be off, had already climbed into the launch.

"Won't you change your mind, John?"

Stoddard shook his head.

"No, mother. Thanks, awfully. I'm going to stay here a while."

"Alone?"

"I've got John for company — the other John; although I'm pretty good company for myself."

"The lunatic is still roaming," volunteered Betty.

"No news of him, eh?"

"One of the men at the hotel thought he heard him yelling off in the woods somewhere, but they haven't found him."

"More likely a loon than a lunatic," commented her brother with a laugh.

"At least you'll come to the station with us," pleaded Mrs. Stoddard.

He had not planned to do that. But he could give no good reason for refusing. After all, it merely meant a few hours. Then he would come back and —

"Surely," he said. "Wait a minute."

The Indian was dozing the forenoon away, up by the camp-fire. Stoddard went to where he sat and shook him by the shoulder.

"I'm going up to the station," he said, dropping his voice to a low key. "Tell the lady I will be back. Put yourself at her orders and take good care of her."

John nodded and resumed his doze.

The launch swung away from the island, with Stoddard aboard and his canoe towing astern.

Mrs. Stoddard did not revert directly to the desire of her heart, which was to tear her son away from this uncouth wilderness and carry him back to the life luxurious. But she did talk of Estelle Wallace — casually always, yet persistently and adroitly. It was astonishing how easily Estelle slipped into the conversation. At first Stoddard paid no attention; later he found himself listening in quiet amusement at his mother's skill.

At Deepwater Station Stoddard, excusing himself for a moment, sought Billy Mason, the stationmaster, and drew him into a secluded corner. Looking him steadily in the eye, Stoddard asked:

"Are you hunting a lunatic for a reward, Billy?"

Mason's eyes squinted and twinkled.

"I guess I could find him if I needed the money," he chuckled.

"Does anybody else know?"

"I don't think so."

"Well, I made an awful mistake, Billy. But for heaven's sake don't give me away. You won't lose a cent."

"Oh, I knew there was some mistake, Mr. Stoddard. But I was fooling about that reward. Lord, I wouldn't give you away!"

"Just the same I'll see you don't lose anything," declared Stoddard, gripping the stationmaster's hand. "Just forget you ever saw or heard anything."

"Sure thing."

Uncle Harry's private car, into which Mrs. Stoddard, Betty, and Larry Livingston had already fled that they might escape from an unwelcome world, was fitted much after the manner of a steam-yacht on wheels. If not actually the last word in luxury, certainly it belonged somewhere in the last paragraph.

To this trio of travelers the sensation of boarding it once more was like that of a return to the Garden of Eden. To Stoddard, who followed them after his interview with Billy Mason, it was a sybaritic irritation. He did not despise comfort, nor even luxury; but in the woods-country these things were of a different kind.

Larry had already retired to the stateroom assigned to him and was effecting a change of costume, having recovered the clothes he had checked in his grip at Deepwater Station.

There was a delay in departure that was interminable to Stoddard. The special engine did not appear for more than an hour, and after this came a long wait for telegraphic orders and the clearance of a right of way.

Mrs. Stoddard and Betty found their son and brother indifferent company. He was preoccupied, talked in a rambling, absent-minded fashion, and evinced little interest in the trip concerning which they poured forth pleasing predictions. He wanted to be off and away to his island and what awaited him there.

It was midafternoon when the car pulled out, in

the presence of a group of interested loungers. The parting between Stoddard and Livingston was of the briefest character. The former was still harboring his resentment at the incident of the morning, and Larry did not venture reference to it.

There was, however, a quiet smile on his lips as he joined Mrs. Stoddard and Betty on the rear platform and waved a good-by to the big man who stood in the middle of the track, looking after them. Larry believed he had played a part in guiding Destiny. In his narrow way he was shrewd; he had confidence in his own judgment of human nature.

Stoddard did not wait for the car to disappear from sight, but went down to the landing, where his canoe lay, and began his ten-mile journey down the Northeast Arm. It was midafternoon.

He neither hurried nor loafed, but laid to his work methodically, his head bent and his mind filled only with thoughts of the wonderful thing that had come into his life. He was glad to be alone.

Two hours later he sprang ashore upon the island and hurried up to the camp. Neither Sadie nor John was there. With eager steps he set off along the shore. She would be somewhere by the water's edge, he knew, watching her wonder-country. What he would say he did not know; there was no speech framed on his lips. He knew only that the words would come when he found her.

A complete circuit of the island brought him back to the camp with no sign of Sadie. He raised his voice in a halloo, but no answer came. Then he noticed that the Indian's canoe was missing.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FLIGHT

WHEN Stoddard had satisfied himself that he was the sole tenant of the island his state of mind was anything but placid. His immediate sensation was that of disappointment. He was impatient now. He feared, too, for what she must think of him — a laggard in love.

For Sadie, he knew, understood what was on his lips and had been waiting for it tremulously; he had seen that in her eyes, had felt it in the warm clasp of her fingers. He cursed Livingston for a marplot; he cursed himself for having fled with his love unspoken.

It was not until an hour passed and the sunset had come that he began to be alarmed. John had doubtless taken her fishing somewhere in the birch-bark canoe, he knew; but it was past time for them to return. What delayed them?

For the first time he was experiencing the apprehensions that can flood the mind of an uneasy lover. He had visions of mishaps to a frail canoe. He thought of every conceivable disaster that might befall the traveler in the Deepwater country. He pictured Sadie in the grip of some unhappy and

perilous circumstance, and the fact that John was careful and competent did not serve to lighten his forebodings.

When he could stand the suspense no longer he leaped into his canoe and made a reconnaissance. Whither to go, however, he could not tell, so his search consisted merely of a trip around the island, which brought him back to the landing-place with no glimpse of the missing ones nor the birch-bark craft. The red ball of the sun was hidden now and the shadows were long and gray.

He fell to pacing the narrow limits of the camp like a creature in a cage. He tried to tell himself that this was a childish anxiety laying hold upon him; yet he could not shake it off. He wanted to seek her, but was helpless even to make a start.

Once he thought of the hotel. Perhaps she had bidden John to take her thither. Yet in the same instant he doubted that she would go without him.

Stoddard was still enchained by futile worry when a glance toward the lake showed him the Indian's canoe approaching the island. He bounded to the water's edge and waited.

As it drew close something like a chill swept over him. There was nobody in the canoe save John, smoking unconcernedly and wielding his paddle lazily.

Stoddard called across the stretch of water and waved his arms wildly. The Indian put down his pipe and quickened his pace.

"Where is she?" cried Stoddard as the canoe neared the island.

"Gone," answered John unemotionally.

"Gone!"

"Sure!"

"Gone where? What do you mean?"

"You got letter?"

"No!"

"She left letter," remarked the Indian as his canoe touched the rock.

"Where is it?"

"Tent."

Stoddard dashed up the bank. Crossing the camp-clearing in leaps, he flung aside the flap of the light canvas shelter and dived within.

Lying on the blankets was a folded paper, weighted with a little stone. He seized it and carried it outside, for the light within the tent was too dim for reading.

Sadie had written:

DEAR FRIEND:

Im going away Jack — its the best way I guess. Their dont seem to be any jobs up here like I thought and you musent bother trying to get one for me, now I wont be here.

I guess a girl has got to work in the city But I aint sorry I came up here Jack I hope its all right for me to call you that, its only for now anyhow. You been awful good to me and I cant ever thank you for all the things you done. Ive had a little bit of outdoors anyhow and they cant ever take that from me But I can see I made a mistake comeing at all

I couldent stay to say good-by Jack it would have hurt too much I did a lot of thinking while you was gone with your mother Mr. Livingston maybe will tell you some time, for he is right even if I dont like him

So good-by Jack I wont ever forget you and all you done for me Im going to believe youll think of me once in a while because that will help some Im sorry I cant write you a better letter but —

Did you know I been praying for you every night I always will Jack. God bless you

SADIE.

Stoddard stood motionless as a statue for several minutes. His brain was dull and numb. He was struggling to make himself believe. Sadie was gone! He read the letter a second time. Gone she was, beyond all doubt. But where?

Now he sprang into action. The Indian was leaning over his beached canoe, examining a doubtful spot in the bark, when Stoddard almost upset him with the fury of a grip that spun him around like a top.

"Where did she go?" he shouted.

"Took train," said John placidly.

"Where?"

"Lower Station."

"You took her there?"

The Indian nodded.

"The down-train? The six forty-five?"

"Sure."

It had been gone from the Lower Station more than an hour. Stoddard swore aloud.

"When did she start?"

"Oh, plenty time."

"Where is she going to?"

John shrugged his shoulders to indicate that he had no idea.

"Did she have a ticket?"

"She would pay on train, she said."

Stoddard paused, baffled. Anger and dismay almost choked him as he glared at the little Indian.

"Tell me exactly what she did after I left the island this morning," he commanded.

"She come to camp one hour, maybe two, after you go away," said John carefully. "She sit around. I get some lunch, but she don't eat much. Then she get some paper and write. She write a long time. After she write she cry."

"Cried!"

"Sure. Then she put um letter in the tent. Then she tell me she had to get train. She tell me to take her there. That's all."

"You went by the portage?"

"Yes."

"How long did you have to wait for the train?"

"'Bout half-hour. I didn't wait. She tell me not to."

"How do you know she caught the train?"

"Heard it stop while I paddle across the bay. I set signal."

"Didn't she leave any message for me?"

The Indian pointed to the letter, which was still in Stoddard's hand.

"That's all," he said.

"And you're positive she didn't say where she was going?"

"She said she go home. She didn't talk much."

Stoddard read the letter a third time. Now it had the effect of working him into a state of im-

potent rage. He turned upon the Indian savagely.

"How dared you take her away from this island?" he demanded.

"She say she had to go," answered John.

"But what business did you have to help her?"

"You tell me to take lady's orders. You don't tell me to keep her here."

That John had acted within his orders even Stoddard could not gainsay. He was furious at himself now.

"You say take good care of her," added John in defense. "I do. She catch train plenty time."

Stoddard suddenly remembered a phrase in the letter.

"She says something about Mr. Livingston here," he said. "Did she talk with him to-day?"

"This morning, down that way," answered John, pointing toward the other end of the island.

"After I had come back to camp?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear any of it?"

"No; too far away."

Stoddard looked grim. Larry had something to do with this — Larry, the meddler. What did Sadie mean when she wrote that Livingston might tell him some time — and that Livingston was right? His fingers yearned for a grip on Larry's throat — for a chance to shake the truth from him.

"What a stupid coward I was!" he muttered. "To let him scare me away! Just as if anything else in the world existed — then! And what must she think of me!"

He turned again to the Indian, who had resumed the interrupted examination of his canoe. John, innocent instrument of Stoddard's despair, suddenly appeared to remember something.

"I forgot," he said, and began fumbling in a pocket.

Presently he withdrew from it a crumpled roll of paper and offered it to Stoddard.

"She say to give you this," he explained.

Stoddard unfolded the paper and found, lying in the palm of his hand, a strand of golden-bronze hair. He felt a tightness in his throat as he looked at it. Gently he passed the silken skein through his fingers, marveling at the softness and smoothness of it. Then he put it into the pocket of his shirt — the same pocket as that into which Sadie had pinned a letter.

"You're sure this is all, John?" he asked. "You haven't forgotten anything more?"

"No."

Twilight had deepened into early evening darkness when Stoddard wandered a little distance along the shore and sat heavily upon a bowlder. The anger had left him, but his face was very grave. In his heart was the soreness of bitter disappointment. For a time he had no will to do anything save brood over misfortune.

Then he roused himself impatiently.

"I'm acting like a child," he said aloud. "I've done enough crying. Now what's to be done?"

Did he want Sadie Hicks, the factory-girl?

He asked himself this question frankly as a be-

ginning, although the answer was already written in his heart. But Stoddard had determined to restore his mind to a state of discipline, as a necessary step to the accomplishment of anything whatever.

Sadie was unlearned of books and of speech; her knowledge of things beyond her immediate little world was small and imperfect; there were times when he could not listen to her without an involuntary shudder; she was uneducated, untaught in the graces of the women who peopled his own world; he would be unable to take her among them. All these things were true, he told himself; he must be careful not to lose sight of them.

What else?

Well, Sadie was brave and true-hearted and tender. Her speech stumbled, but her mind traveled straight. She looked upward and steadfastly toward her ideals. She had warmth and sympathy. She did not lie nor evade, but spoke with the simplicity of a child. She was a woman, unspoiled.

She was beautiful, beyond all question; he had never seen her like. She stirred his imagination strangely. She awakened in him a curious mingling of respect and pity. Yet the pity seemed evanescent; he was conscious that it was slowly fading. Something clothed her about with an atmosphere of simple dignity and nobility, and this despite her speech and the unlettered mind from which it sprang.

He loved her. He would always love her.

That he told himself, calmly. This woman was his mate.

Thus Stoddard answered his first question. He loved her; therefore it followed that he wanted her.

Wanting her, he must seek. Where?

The Indian told him she talked of going home. Her letter contained the pathetic conclusion that the place for a girl to work was in the city. Buffalo, then. He could think of no other place. Sadie herself knew none, save the little Ohio town that was her birthplace.

Therefore she must have returned to Buffalo. He would first seek her there. If he failed there circumstance would lead him elsewhere. But the search would end only when he had found her.

When would he seek her? That was simple. Once Stoddard had planned a course, he went upon it without delay. He would start to-night.

The night mail, south-bound, would reach the Lower Station at eleven-fifty. There was ample time for it. True, it went only to North Bay, but it would set him on his journey. It was better than waiting for the morning.

With a heart amazingly lightened, now that his mind was clearly set upon a definite purpose, Stoddard went briskly back to camp, where he found John with supper ready. He ate heartily.

"I take the night train, John," he said when the meal was over. The Indian merely nodded.

"I don't know when I'll be back. You can pack up my stuff and take it to Deepwater Station. I'll

send word what to do with it later. My city clothes are there, too. I haven't time to get them now. I'll send you some money later; I need what I have with me."

John indicated that he understood.

"I'll catch the train at the Lower Station," added Stoddard. "And I guess I'll start now."

"How about canoe?" asked the Indian.

"I'll leave it at the landing-place and you can pick it up later, unless you want to come along now."

John evinced no desire to make another trip to the Lower Station. He felt sleepy, and the tent and blankets were alluring. He said he would get the canoe to-morrow.

A minute later Stoddard was crossing the Northeast Arm, headed for the entrance to the portage that crossed the neck of the peninsula. He did not hesitate to try conclusions with it again, even though it had used him hardly a few nights before. He imagined he would have little trouble; various sore spots upon his person still existed as reminders of every pitfall in the treacherous path.

A young moon was shining as he drew his canoe from the water on the opposite side of the Northeast Arm and made it ready for the carry. No moose, tarrying late for a nocturnal supper, greeted him to-night. The forest was in deep slumber.

The crossing of the portage exacted a toll of heavy labor, but he escaped the punishment of ignorance and stumbling feet. He remembered the trees that had tripped him, the rocks that lay in wait for a misstep, and he profited thereby. When he

dropped his canoe into the waters of Island Bay he sighed comfortably and triumphantly.

"It was almost too tame this time," he said. "Seems as if I didn't get all I was entitled to."

There was a slender streak of moonlight on the water. Into this he headed the canoe, for it was almost exactly marking the path to the Lower Station. Presently he was among the still islands, where the course became winding and apparently aimless and where there were numerous channels, any one of which would lead toward his goal. He chose that which was most direct.

As he slid the canoe through a narrow passage between two of the islands a sound of voices reached his ears. Automatically he rested his paddle and listened. Men were talking somewhere off to the right.

"I don't see that it's any use to hang around here," growled one voice. "We've tried it two nights now and nothing doing."

"Well, it was your tip," came the answer. "I didn't bring you here."

"Jim said he found a track over here. That's what brought us."

"I don't believe he found anything."

"Well, I showed you some tracks myself."

"Anything might have made 'em," retorted the second voice in disgust.

Stoddard dipped his paddle again and smiled. Somebody was getting ready to violate the game-laws of the Deepwater. It was none of his concern; besides, he had no time to waste investigating.

The canoe passed the narrows and shot out into a broader sheet of water, where the moonlight played again.

"Listen!"

One of the voices spoke abruptly.

"What is it?"

"Somebody in a canoe. I heard the paddle."

"Has he got one?"

"God knows. I suppose so."

Stoddard was puzzled. He halted again for a moment; then remembered the south-bound train and resumed his course.

As he did so he heard the noise of running feet on a rocky shore, then a splashing, followed by a sound of hasty paddling behind him. He paused for a third time and looked back. Now he made out the dim bulk of a moving canoe. It was headed directly in his wake.

"Funny!" he muttered. "But I've no time to wait."

He had taken less than a dozen strokes when a voice hailed from the darkness.

"Halt!"

Stoddard hesitated involuntarily.

"What's the trouble?" he called.

"We want a look at you!" said the voice sharply.

Although his curiosity was aroused to the keenest pitch, Stoddard could not risk the missing of the night mail.

"Can't wait. I'm in a hurry," he answered, laying to his paddle once more.

"Halt!" The command this time was more peremptory.

"Cut out the melodrama," advised Stoddard over his shoulder as he turned the point of an island and bore away for another channel ahead.

"We'll fire!"

This time Stoddard laughed and kept steadily on his way. The very absurdity of the thing appealed to him. Piracy was unknown in the Deepwater. This was some crude joke — astonishing, it was true, yet surely a joke, although it would have been an uncomfortable one for a timid man.

A rifle cracked, and somewhere off to his left a bullet cut the surface of Island Bay.

Stoddard stopped laughing. This was carrying a joke too far. He was minded to stop and demand an explanation. Then a picture of Sadie flashed into his mind. Every minute was taking her farther away from him. He could not stop.

"I warn you to stop shooting!" he called as he put forth all his strength, so that the shaft of the paddle bent ominously.

The answer was a second shot, equally wide of the mark. Stoddard's canoe was flying now. Then he heard the voices again.

"Stop shooting and get to work!" exclaimed one.

"But he won't halt."

"Take your paddle. We'll catch him. There's no reward for dead men."

A great light dawned upon Stoddard's puzzled mind. So they were hunting the "lunatic" — the

wild man who had dashed up to the incoming train at the Deepwater station that day, seized Mrs. Westfall, without explanation or apology, snatched her across the platform and literally thrown her into the south-bound train just as it was moving out of the station. But how could Stoddard explain that there was no "lunatic" to hunt for — that he had only mistaken Mrs. Westfall for some one else, and that in the hurry and confusion there had been no chance for either to put the other right.

Stoddard was both amused and alarmed. The whole affair, and especially this present episode, was too ridiculous not to be laughed at; yet it bade fair to cause him annoyance, embarrassing explanations and above all disastrous delay. He, John Stoddard, C. E., of old and distinguished family, hunted down for a madman! He chuckled. Simultaneously he thought of Sadie again and became grim.

As he could now hear a furious paddling astern of him he assumed that the rifle had been laid aside in favor of pursuit. He felt more comfortable. Although by no means nervous, Stoddard had no relish for serving as a target for pot-shots in the dark. He had been under fire in semi-civilized countries, whither his profession had called him, and he did not regard the sensation as a pastime nor one to be courted when it could be avoided.

A race he did not mind. He judged he had a lead of perhaps a hundred yards, and, although two men can drive a canoe faster than one, he was willing to take the chances of keeping the lead. So he settled himself firmly on his knees, determined to

give this pair of maniac-hunters a contest worthy of their desperate, if foolish, purpose.

Five minutes later he was clear of the islands, with a mile of open water ahead, at the end of which lay the rotting wharf of the Lower Station. Had there been time to spare Stoddard would have enjoyed a hide-and-seek chase among the islands, where he was confident he could easily elude pursuit. But he could not afford that.

That they saw him clearly as he started across this broad reach of Island Bay he knew readily from their shouts. It did not take him long, either, to become aware of the fact that the second canoe was gaining, but he consoled himself with the thought that this was to be expected. The important question was, how rapidly would they gain and would he reach the shore ahead of them?

No sound came from either craft now, save those of heavy breathing and rapidly wielded paddles. It was no time for talk in the craft of the pursuers. The pair who manned the paddles were awake to the size of their task, for the man ahead was driving his canoe at a furious pace.

Half a mile farther found the two craft separated by not more than a hundred feet. Stoddard was breathing heavily, but his arms and body worked with the same machine-like precision and power. He even had a final spurt stored within him, if he needed it. Once he glanced back, only to return to his work with fresh determination.

"The fools!" he muttered.

Behind him two toiling men were now calling en-

couragement to each other as the distance that separated them from their quarry lessened, despite the fact that to call cost precious breath.

"He's nearly in!" gasped one. "Hang to it!"

Stoddard caught the words and flung back a mocking laugh. He would show them how nearly in he was.

But now another and different sound reached his ears. It was the faint whistle of a train.

"Good Lord!" he thought. "Less time than I figured! I'd have missed it sure if I hadn't had somebody to chase me!"

The dock was less than two hundred yards ahead when he began his spurt. The quickening of pace was barely perceptible, yet it was a little. The canoe behind responded to the challenge. But twenty yards away now, it was cleaving the water like a powerboat.

Again came the long droning of a locomotive-whistle, clearer this time and obviously nearer.

Stoddard was putting the last ounce of his strength into his blade, but he was losing ground. Ten yards separated the canoes, and the landing was still fifty yards away. He was thinking rapidly, but did not falter in his stroke.

One of the men had a gun, perhaps both. They would reach the station platform almost as soon as he. There would be no time to set a signal. Already he could hear the rumbling of the cars. Whatever was to be done must be done at the landing.

As his canoe ran alongside the rotten platform he

rose to his feet and sprang out, still clinging to his paddle. Then he faced swiftly about.

The pursuing craft, but a length behind, touched the landing an instant later. Two men leaped from it, one of whom, as Stoddard could see in the half-moonlight, carried a rifle in his hands. He brought it quickly to his shoulder and aimed at Stoddard's breast.

"Hands up!" he commanded.

A scant two yards separated the muzzle of the gun from the target at which it was pointed. At the same distance, a little to the right, crouched the figure of the second man, ready to close at a bound.

"Don't shoot," said Stoddard.

He raised his hands above his head in obedience to orders, the paddle grasped crosswise in them.

A series of sharp blasts from the locomotive whistle came shrieking through the trees.

Stoddard's upraised arms were flung forward swiftly, and the paddle flew from his hands. The shaft of it struck squarely across the face of the man with the pointed gun. He uttered a gasping cry of pain and staggered backward. The rifle clattered to the platform.

In the same instant Stoddard whirled upon his second pursuer and launched his two-hundred-pound bulk behind a swinging fist. The blow caught the man on the shoulder, spun him like a windmill and landed him in the shallow water of the cove.

Stoddard fled up the path toward the station. The train was ahead of him. No signal had been set; there was no time to set one.

As he gained the platform the locomotive rolled past him. The brakes were grinding for the curve just below, but the train was still moving at a twenty-mile gait.

Stoddard was excited, but not foolhardy. There was only one chance fit to take and that was the rear platform. If he missed he would get no worse than a bad fall. He poised himself and waited. The fifth and last car reached him. Simultaneously he broke into a run beside it, his eyes glancing backward. A second later a hand-rail slid past him. The fingers of his left hand closed upon it swiftly, and he sprang. A foot slipped on the lower step, and he fell to his knees, his body swaying outward. But his grip held.

Now his right hand groped for a hold and secured it. His knees had slipped from the step, and his feet were dragging on the rough stone roadbed. Grinding his teeth and setting his shoulder-muscles for a mighty effort, Stoddard slowly drew himself upward. First his knees regained the bottom step, then he was on his feet. Then he fell face-downward on the platform and lay there.

"That was for you, Sadie!" he gasped, smiling.

CHAPTER XIX

FOUND

GETTING to Buffalo proved not so simple a matter as Stoddard calculated. He fell under the disapproving eye of Federal authority when he touched American soil at Niagara Falls. It was not a question of smuggling; he had nothing but the clothes he wore and three dollars and forty cents, his entire cash balance after payment of railroad fare. It appeared that he was an " undesirable immigrant."

This confidential tip was passed by the conductor of his train to the immigration officials stationed at the line. They invited Stoddard into the office and inspected him. He looked singularly undesirable.

For several days his beard had been growing famously. He had no hat. His shirt was not only ripped at the shoulder, but had two or three lesser rents. His hands and arms were roughly scarred. His trousers, tucked into a pair of lumbermen's socks, which in turn disappeared into hunting-boots, were vying with his shirt in the matter of ventilation. His boots were sad remnants of former ruggedness.

The immigration officials were downcast as they looked him over. They liked the size of him first

rate, and they accused him of no physical ailments. But that was all they liked.

Casually they wrote "L. P. C." after his name, which was already entered upon a blank form. Those are grim letters for the immigrant, as thousands who are turned back from the shores of Ellis Island know to their dismay. "L. P. C." is immigration slang for "Likely to become a public charge."

It took Stoddard more than an hour to convince the United States government, as represented at the brink of Niagara, that he was not only a citizen of the republic, but was native-born and eligible to become President if his fellow Americans happened to fancy him.

He was wroth about the delay that his benevolent country was forcing upon him. He stoutly asserted his right to return to the land of his birth, clad in nothing and bearing not so much as a red cent, if he so chose. He expressed himself on this and other related matters very freely, very fully and at times very originally.

When he arrived at a profane peroration they decided he was an American and let him go. He insisted on tearing up the L. P. C. record with his own hands.

He left the office wondering what they had done to Sadie, whose costume and whose finances were in not much better state than his own. He went back to ask.

"Oh, yes; we remember her," said a uniformed person. "She came through early this morning.

Yes; we asked her some questions. Did she have any difficulty? Not after talking for two minutes. She talks United States."

"Did she happen to say where she was going?"

"Her ticket read to Buffalo."

Stoddard departed in elation and with a better opinion of the immigration watch-dogs. They had not exactly furnished him with a clew, but they had confirmed his theory.

He went to Buffalo by trolley rather than wait for a train, and it was evening when he reached there. His first act was to eat, for he was ravenous. But he did not eat at the hotel to which he went without delay. The head waiter arranged that disappointment. He apologetically reminded Stoddard of his costume. Stoddard saw the point at once; he had forgotten about his clothes. At a place where they sold "regular" dinners for thirty-five cents each there was no head waiter and no reminder. Stoddard ate two of the dinners. They were pretty good.

It was too late to hunt Sadie. Besides, he was dead tired and he wanted a clear head in the morning. He found a cheap hotel, which did not reject him when he paid for his room in advance. Then he went to bed.

It had been a long, dreary day of travel. The south-bound mail had made all the stops from the Lower Station to North Bay, with Stoddard endeavoring to sleep in a day-coach seat and achieving little success. At North Bay there was a three-hour wait for a connection — three solid hours

during which Sadie was speeding away from him. Then came the slow train to Toronto, then another to Niagara Falls, then the humiliation of the "L. P. C."

He fell asleep promptly, his last moment of consciousness devoted to a wish that he might dream about Sadie. He did not. He dreamed about a lunatic in the Deepwater, who had been engaged by the railroad to facilitate the discharging and receiving of passengers, and who hurled them on and off trains by the handful. It was a diverting dream until the passengers began playing medicine-ball with the lunatic.

In the morning he made an early start, beginning with a shave, which cost fifteen cents, and a "regular" breakfast, which cost twenty-five. This left him a dollar and sixty cents of capital. Part of this was invested in a telegram to New York, calling upon the engineering firm for whom he did field-work to wire him funds at once. Then he went to look for Sadie.

A hatless ragamuffin in a city street is common enough and worthy of no particular note. But when a hatless ragamuffin is clean-shaven and deeply tanned, when he is very large in person and very determined in aspect, and when the rags upon his back are of a kind strange to city eyes, it is a different matter. Folk stared at Stoddard, and he was conscious of it. But he did not let it trouble him. He was too busy.

Where Sadie had lived before she started upon her adventure he did not know, nor was he sure

she had returned there. But the Challenge Shirt Company was easy to find. He consulted a directory and obtained the address, to which he went without delay.

The plain brick building annoyed him; it reminded him too much of a penitentiary. The sight of it was enough to make him understand why Sadie had sought escape.

Yet his heart quickened a little as he entered the door which bore above it the word "Office." He wondered if Sadie had returned to her prison. He knew that she had little money left after paying her fare back to Buffalo; he knew also that the little bank account was no more. She would need work, and it was likely that her first seeking would be where she had once been employed.

The man he met in the office turned out to be Mr. Halsey, Sadie's friend. When this neat and conventional person viewed Stoddard standing in the neat and orderly office he received a shock.

"Porter or driver?" asked Mr. Halsey.

"What?"

"You are looking for employment, I take it. I don't know whether any help is needed, but you can see the boss of the shipping department if you wish. Two doors down the street."

Stoddard laughed.

"Thanks. I'm not looking for a job. I'm looking for a Miss Hicks."

"Hicks?" repeated Mr. Halsey, puzzled.

"Sadie Hicks."

"Oh, Sadie! Yes; I understand. Sadie left

here last week, I'm sorry to say. She was a good employee."

"I know she left," said Stoddard. "I want to find out whether she came back."

"I haven't seen her, I'm sure—and she is not difficult to see."

Mr. Halsey smiled at his little joke. He liked to think he was apt at such pleasantries.

"Who will know?"

"You might inquire in the packing department. Mr. Ferguson is the superintendent. One flight up. Take those stairs over there and turn to the right when you reach the top."

When the figure of Stoddard appeared in the doorway of the packing department thirty girls stopped putting shirts into boxes. Thirty pairs of eyes stared. Nos. 4, 11, and 28 giggled aloud. No. 17, who was nearest to Stoddard, said "Pipe!" in a stage whisper; then repented and gave him a roguish smile. Stoddard grinned at her and accepted her as a friendly person.

"I'm looking for Mr. Ferguson," he said.

"The supe?" inquired No. 17.

"That's the man."

No. 17 glanced around the room.

"I don't see him just this minute," she said. "But he'll be here directly. Nice day, ain't it?"

"Immense. Maybe I can hunt Mr. Ferguson up."

"Oh, he'll be right along. You couldn't find him. I bet that's one of our shirts."

"You win. You don't think he'll be long, do you?"

"No, indeed. Ain't you the impatient party! Live in Buffalo?"

"No, thanks."

No. 17 bridled coquettishly in defense of her native city.

"Take it from me, it's some burg," she flashed. "What are you tryin' to do? Kid it — with them clothes?"

Stoddard laughed. No. 17 was a loyal little citizen, and a rather nice-looking one, too.

"I'm from New York," he explained.

"I knew it was a make-up," she said with an emphatic nod. "New York, hey? I met a New York feller once. He took me out a coupla times. Swell dancer. Most of 'em are, from New York, I guess. There's plenty of dancin' in Buffalo, too. I can step a little myself."

She paused and looked at Stoddard archly.

"I ain't been to a dance in a week," she added with a sigh.

"I don't dance."

"No? It's easy enough. Why, I can teach — Gee! What am I sayin'?"

No. 17 faked an instant of attractive confusion.

"Is this Mr. Ferguson coming?" asked Stoddard, pointing.

No. 17 looked across the room — and immediately began to pack shirts into boxes.

"That's the guy," she said over her shoulder. "Ain't he a mut! Glad to 've met you, I'm sure.

We get through here at six. I thought maybe you'd wanta know."

Ferguson came across the packing room with a quick, nervous shuffle and headed in the direction of Stoddard.

"You lookin' for me?" he said.

"Yes."

Stoddard hated the Shrimp, promptly and automatically. He would have done so on Sadie's account anyhow, if it had not been so easy to do it on his own.

The Shrimp was looking up at Stoddard and puffing his little chest, in order to obtain a measure of bulk and dignity. A titter from somewhere in the room reached his ears; he flushed at the temples. The subject of his stature, converted by Sadie into a universal topic the day she left, was a sore one with the Shrimp. He knew that comparisons were being made now. For this fresh opportunity to deride him he blamed the bulk of the big man in the ragged clothes. Hence he hated Stoddard, just because Stoddard towered over him.

"Well, what is it?" demanded the Shrimp.

"You're the superintendent here?"

"Sure."

"I'm looking for a Miss Hicks."

Ferguson's eyes widened for a brief instant; then narrowed to slits.

"Not here," he answered.

"She was here formerly, was she not?"

"You mean a girl who worked as No. 18?"

Stoddard nodded.

"Oh, I fired her last week," said the Shrimp in a grand manner.

"I understand that," observed Stoddard as he bored into Ferguson's soul with a contemptuous glance. "I came to see if you can tell me where to find her."

"Don't know nothin' about her."

"She hasn't been back?"

"No."

"Can you tell me where she lives?"

"I tell you I don't know nothin' about her."

"Anybody here likely to know?" persisted Stoddard with a glance in the direction of the thirty girls.

"There ain't nobody goin' to quit work to talk to you while I'm runnin' this shop," retorted the Shrimp.

Stoddard looked down upon the Shrimp with calm eyes.

"This is an important matter," he said patiently. "I must locate Miss Hicks, and I have reason to believe she is in the city."

"I ain't got time to waste on you," declared the Shrimp, turning to walk away.

He had not moved three feet when he felt his progress gently arrested. Then he began to slide backward. A large, sinewy forefinger inserted between his leather belt and his person, was the cause of the phenomenon. There was smothered laughter from the room.

"You mustn't run away so abruptly," chided Stoddard as he faced the Shrimp about. "I am

talking to you very civilly and it's not nice of you to be discourteous to me. Now, who can tell me something about Miss Hicks?"

The Shrimp was furious.

"You lemme go!" he shouted as he attempted to wriggle loose from the forefinger that still hooked his belt. "You get outa this place!"

"Now, don't be peevish," advised Stoddard softly. "Just be nice and obliging."

"I tell you she's gone!" snarled the Shrimp, still struggling. "I fired her! And a good job, too. She thought she could run my department; got swelled head. I showed her!

"I'm the boss in this place. She wasn't any good, anyhow. I'm pretty partic'lar about people I got workin' here. Gotta protect other girls from —"

The Shrimp paused abruptly as he caught a look in Stoddard's eyes. Then as he watched the big man he saw a ponderous fist clenched and drawn back. Gasping in terror, he made a furious effort to free himself from the detaining finger, but Stoddard changed his mind.

"If you say another word about her I may kill you," he remarked quietly. "I have heard of you. You are the Shrimp."

This time there was a ripple of laughter.

"You are too small to be thrashed," added Stoddard, smiling faintly. "Yet it would be wrong to suspend punishment entirely. So for what you have already said I shall spank you."

Immediately at the conclusion of this speech the Shrimp felt himself lifted bodily from the floor.

The thing was accomplished with one hand. An instant later the squirming figure was deposited face downward upon a pile of shirts waiting to be placed in their proper boxes.

With a hand gripped in the Shrimp's collar in order to hold him in a proper positon, Stoddard, very methodically and without the least display of temper, spanked him.

The Shrimp roared. So did the packing department of the Challenge Shirt Company, but not in kind. Three persons rushed in from the cutting-room and joined the audience. But nobody interfered with the big man. In fact, no one wished to.

The Shrimp, having been spanked soundly and sufficiently, was projected by a mighty push from Stoddard's arm in the direction toward which his head was pointed. He slid along ten feet of table, knocking to the floor such shirts and boxes as lay in his path; then, having arrived at the end of the table, but still possessing some unspent momentum, he dived head-first to the floor, where he lay kicking and thrashing his arms and snarling like a tempestuous child.

Stoddard walked out of the packing-room.

"I couldn't hit him, but I had to do something," he murmured as he started down the stairs.

"*Psst!*"

The sibilant sound came from behind him. Stoddard turned. No. 17 was standing on the landing, beckoning frantically. He retraced his steps.

"I slid out durin' the excitement," she explained. "My, but that was a show! It'll finish Ferguson.

He'll never live that down. I bet he quits when the week's up. The mutt! Say, he lied to you. Do you know that?"

"What about?"

"You're a friend of Sadie's, ain't you?"

Stoddard nodded.

"Well, she was in here yesterday."

Stoddard's heart leaped at the news.

"Yep," said No. 17 with a vigorous nod. "Came in lookin' for her job back. He could 've give her one, too, 'cause we're short a girl. But he wouldn't, for what she said to him the day she left."

"Where did she go?" demanded Stoddard eagerly.

"Don't know," answered No. 17. "There ain't none of us knows. Only she was here all right, and she told No. 12 she needed a job bad and was goin' to find one before the day was out or know why. Sadie and me wasn't particular friends, but I don't mind tellin' you this, just for what you done to the Shrimp."

"Where does she live?"

"I know where she did live," said No. 17, giving him the address. "It's a boardin'-house. Maybe you can get track of her there."

"Lord, but I'm obliged to you!" he exclaimed, thrusting out his hand and gripping the fingers of No. 17.

"Gee, you're strong!" she commented. Also, she pinched his biceps with her free hand and uttered a little cry of wonder.

"What's it all about, anyhow?" she whispered, with a furtive glance toward the packing-room door. "You must want to find her awful bad."

"I do."

"Well," sighed No. 17 as she surveyed Stoddard with frankly admiring eyes, "I don't know as I blame you. Sadie's an awful good-looker. She's kinda queer, that's all. I guess you won't be comin' back here, will you?"

"Not if I find her."

No. 17 shrugged with a gesture meant to be eloquent of resignation.

"Here's luck, then," she said, squeezing his fingers. "And say, Mr. What's-your-name from New York, if you get tired of lookin' for Sadie, why — er — well, I can teach you some of them dance-steps."

"When I want dancing lessons I'll surely come around," laughed Stoddard.

"Honest?"

"Surest thing you know!"

"Aw, you won't be back!" she declared, shaking her head. "But if there's any info' I can pick up about Sadie, just lemme know. No. 17's my number. Name's Alice — A-l-y-s."

"Good-by, Alys," he said. "Ever so thankful. I'm certainly strong for you."

"Stop joshin'! Honest? Say, wait a minute! No, never mind — don't. You got to look for Sadie. So-long!"

She remained at the head of the stairway until he disappeared, then sighed, patted her combs into

place, and went back into the packing department. The first person her eyes rested upon was the Shrimp. She had never seen him look so small.

Reaching the street, Stoddard set off at a brisk walk toward the boarding-house the address of which he had obtained from Alys. Optimism was running strong within him. He knew now to a certainty that Sadie was in Buffalo. He also knew that she needed a job so badly that there was no chance of her leaving the city, even if she desired to, until she had earned some money. He was sure he would find her, though it took days and weeks of searching.

Something else elated him. He had a new and wonderful admiration for Sadie Hicks. More than ever was she remarkable in his eyes. Now he knew the environment whence she had come. He had seen the dreary and stifling packing-room with the Shrimp and its other denizens; he had breathed the factory atmosphere, with all its cheapness and sordidness and weariness.

And out of this she had come, like some beautiful flower rearing itself above a bed of weeds, unspoiled and without the taint of it all. Back in the dismal room where she earned her seven dollars a week she had seen, not the monotonous toil and the grimness of human beings become machines, but fair visions of her big outdoors. Her mind had risen, though her body might be chained.

"She shall have her dream when I find her," he said half aloud.

The boarding-house reminded him of the fac-

tory. It was another bit of environment that had made no impress upon Sadie. It was clean, but prim and cheerless. All the hope, if any it ever harbored, seemed gone from it.

"I am looking for Sadie Hicks," he told the landlady, who was lean, tired-looking, and "particular" about her lodgers.

"She left last week," was the answer that accompanied a swift and suspicious inspection of his person.

"Been back?"

"Came here yesterday afternoon, but her room was let. I don't have rooms standin' idle."

"Any idea where I can find her?"

"No."

The door closed simultaneously with the answer.

Stoddard lost a shade of his optimism. Finding Sadie might not be so simple, after all. He walked slowly down the street, his head bent and his forehead wrinkled. Occasionally he bumped into people, apologizing perfunctorily. Most of them stared after him.

Just what to do next puzzled him. He thought of returning to the factory and maintaining a vigil, in the hope that Sadie might return, having failed elsewhere to obtain anything to do. But he decided this was too negative a method and that in any event the time for it had not arrived.

His costume was a handicap and an annoyance, he soon discovered. It attracted disconcerting attention. Also, he was embarrassed for lack of money. His capital was now eighty-five cents.

On revisiting the telegraph-office he was disappointed to find that as yet there had been no answer to his wired request for money. They told him to drop in later.

After that he did a great deal of walking, up one street and down another, with no very definite purpose in view. He bought several newspapers and studied the "want ad" pages with a view to getting an idea of what sort of jobs girls in a big city looked for. This led him to the plan of advertising for Sadie, which struck him as rather brilliant and simple. She would surely be reading the want columns, he thought. But he could not advertise until his remittance came.

Then he thought of Sadie and the movies and made a resolve to keep close watch upon the gaudy picture-palaces that evening, although he was not sure that in her present financial straits she could afford to spend nickels on luxuries.

If all else failed he conceived the scheme of sending out a general movie alarm; he would have an appeal to Sadie flashed on every picture-screen in Buffalo. But this, too, was a matter for future consideration. His case was not yet so desperate.

Stoddard was hungry. He counted his money. Four cents invested in newspapers left him eighty-one cents. As it was mid-afternoon he decided to eat.

Several restaurant windows made alluring appeals to his eyes, but not to his finances. He wanted something cheap. He decided not to spend more than a quarter on this meal.

At last he found his place. Standing on the sidewalk was a sign that related the entire menu — all sorts of combinations "with coffee, tea, or milk." He studied the lists with the determination to obtain the maximum of bulk for his money. Two fried eggs with bacon, rolls, butter, and coffee, all for a quarter, sounded a good deal like breakfast, but he was not particular. He went inside.

The place was narrow and dingy, with tables huddled in close array against the walls. A girl cashier inspected him as he passed the desk and curled her lip. The Royal boasted no swells among its patrons; yet on the other hand it rarely descended to the entertainment of wild men in tatters.

Stoddard seated himself at an unoccupied table, gave his order to an impatient and indifferent girl, and began contemplating the passers-by without. He grudged the minutes required to fry his eggs; they were so many lost in his quest. He heard the man behind him complaining of delayed chops and heard a waitress answer that she was not "his" waitress, but would convey his sentiments to the kitchen.

The next thing Stoddard became conscious of was a tremendous crash of dishes directly behind him. Coffee from a shattered cup spattered his boots. Two wan-looking chops slid across the tiled floor. He turned to inspect the wrecked tray. Then he glanced upward at the aproned waitress who had dropped it. She was staring at him.

Sadie!

CHAPTER XX

"I LOVE YOU!"

STODDARD neither did nor said any of the things he had planned to do and say when he found Sadie Hicks. Instead he stood up and said stupidly:

"Hello!"

"Hello!" she answered like an echo.

Then the customer who had waited for his chops ventured into the conversation.

"Say!" he rasped, glaring at Sadie. "Think I'm payin' to have my meals served on the floor? I waited long enough for them chops. This is a deuce of a restaurant."

Following which, he tossed his napkin into the mess on the floor and walked out of the place.

A fat man with a cigar in his teeth came running from the rear, glaring as he approached. He shook his fist in Sadie's face.

"You said you was a waitress!" he screamed shrilly. "See what you done!"

He pointed tragically downward.

"I seen it," said Sadie wearily.

"You a waitress! Twenty cents' worth of dishes gone, a quarter's worth of grub, and a customer! Do you think I'm runnin' a hash-house?

Was that there man sittin' on the floor, that you chuck his vittles on it?"

"Shut up!" said Stoddard shortly. "Come on, Sadie."

"She comes to work only this mornin' and —"

"Well, she's quitting now. Here's a quarter for what I ordered. Chuck my grub on the floor, too, if you like."

Stoddard had Sadie by the arm and was urging her toward the door. The proprietor of the Royal followed them, delivering himself of copiously worded thoughts.

"It was a accident," explained Sadie as she was borne steadily in the direction of the street. "I —"

"Keep still!" commanded Stoddard. "Let's get out of here."

"Yes, sir," answered Sadie meekly.

"Don't you say 'sir' to me."

"No, sir."

The cashier girl stopped chewing gum as they passed her desk; then turned to the perspiring owner and inquired calmly:

"Who'll I charge them dishes to?"

Out on the sidewalk Stoddard and Sadie were rapidly leaving the scene of disaster behind. His grip on her arm would have caused most girls to cry out in pain. Stoddard was unconscious of the viselike pressure his fingers exerted. So was Sadie. She walked mechanically, like a woman in a trance.

Once she glanced up at him timidly. His face was so grim that it frightened her. His lips were

set tightly, his chin was thrust forward truculently, as he hurried onward with long strides. She had difficulty in keeping pace with him, but Stoddard took no note of that either.

Only one thought occupied his mind. He had captured Sadie. To carry her off was mere instinct. He had no idea whither he was taking her, no plan whatever. He was simply a captor with his prey.

They turned into a busy shopping-street and began bumping into people. Stoddard brushed them aside and dragged Sadie onward. She tried to fall into his rapid step and found herself fairly running. Not until her initial bewilderment began to subside did she realize that a crowd had started to follow, laughing and hurling sidewalk wit.

"My hat!" she exclaimed. "It's back at the restaurant.

"I'll get you another," he said shortly.

On they walked. Sadie, looking behind her fearfully, beheld a mirthful gallery of followers. Her arms were bare to the elbows, like those of Stoddard, and her apron was flying in the wind.

"We're follered," she informed him hesitatingly. "A crowd of people's after us."

Stoddard glanced backward as if abruptly wakened from a dream; then mentally cursed the shopping-crowd for a pack of idle curiosity-seekers. But he also realized the spectacle that was being furnished for their amusement.

They reached a crossing where a trolley-car had halted. Without taking note of its direction or destination he propelled Sadie aboard the rear platform

and followed her. He handed the conductor a dime.

"Transfers?" asked the official as he stared at his new passengers.

"No," answered Stoddard, and plunged into the car behind Sadie.

She was already crowding into the far corner of a crosswise seat, trying to shrink from the scrutiny of wondering eyes. He sat beside her and looked straight ahead, very stern of countenance.

Persons in seats ahead of them, influenced by that psychic phenomenon that spreads intelligence in a crowd, turned to stare and grin. But none of the passengers spoke of the pair save in whispers. The expression on the big man's face was too forbidding.

Sadie again ventured a glance at her captor. He seemed oblivious to her presence. Her own heart was beating rapidly. She was excited, bewildered, content. Just what it was all coming to she did not attempt to guess. She simply knew she was free of the dismal restaurant and a prisoner in the hands of No. 44. That was enough for the present.

The car went onward for many blocks, stopping often to disembark passengers who had stared and smiled and to receive new ones, who took up the scrutiny where others left it. Stoddard was unconscious of it all. He sat with a frown on his face, his jaws set tightly, his sinewy arms folded uncompromisingly across his broad chest.

Once Sadie spoke after more than a quarter of an hour had elapsed.

"Where — where are we going?" she asked hesitantly.

"Anywhere," was the answer she received.

She did not interrogate him as to the location of "anywhere," and Stoddard, if he had any notions on the subject, did not enlighten her.

They were running through a suburban section now. Sadie knew it well; she had ridden out that way on Sundays many a time. Stoddard paid no attention to the changing landscape. He was still sitting rigidly, eyes front. Nearly all of the passengers had left the car, but he was not aware of that either.

Suburban villas gave way to country houses and city yards to fields and little clumps of woods. Sadie watched the change with dreamy satisfaction. She did not care where they were going nor possess any curiosity in the matter. No. 44 would explain it all when the time came. She was glad that at any rate they were leaving the city behind, for she knew that she presented a dreadful spectacle to the eyes of urban dwellers.

"All out!"

The car was at the end of the line and the conductor was switching the trolley-pole, while the motorman, controller in hand, now enjoyed his first view of his very extraordinary passengers.

Stoddard roused himself and stood up. Then he reached for Sadie's arm.

"Come on," he said.

She followed with complete docility. They found themselves on a dusty country road. Still

gripping her firmly, he began walking in a course away from the city. They passed loosely scattered farmhouses and stretches of field and cow-pasture.

Sadie noted them, but her companion saw them not. His mind was utterly remote from their environment. Not until the road began to wind through a clump of woods did he give any sign of being awake to his surroundings.

A break in a stone wall on one side of the road caught his eye. He steered Sadie across the ditch and through the opening. They walked onward among the trees, down a sloping hillside. Presently the tinkle of water reached her ears; then the silver flash of a running brook was visible. They halted at the brink of it.

Stoddard sighed and looked about him. There was a little grassy spot a few yards distant, past which the stream flowed musically. He led Sadie to it.

"Sit down," he said.

She obeyed mechanically; then looked up at him. He was studying her with an expression that brought a swift blush of recollection to her cheeks. She dropped her glance and began plucking blades of grass from the sod at her feet. Stoddard, contemplating the top of her head for a moment, seated himself cross-legged in front of her.

"Now we're ready to talk," he announced.

"Yes," she assented. "About what?"

"Everything."

"You begin," she suggested.

Sadie was greatly puzzled, perhaps a little disap-

pointed. She was thinking of the morning in the Deepwater when he stood with her hands imprisoned in his, his glance reading her very heart, while it revealed his own.

"Well, I received your letter," he said.

Sadie made no comment.

"I followed you as quickly as I could," he added. "I caught the late train. I got here last night.

She nodded.

"You had no business to run away," he said, and there was severity in his voice. "It wasn't fair."

"Wasn't it?" Her tone was small and meek.

"You know it wasn't. You wouldn't have dared to try it if I'd been there."

"Maybe not."

"Why did you do it?"

She gave him a swift, appealing glance, but made no answer.

"Tell me why," he commanded.

"You — you got the letter. It was in there."

"It was not," he declared sternly. "You know it was not."

"I said there wasn't any jobs up there for a girl, didn't I?"

"But that was not the reason you left. It was something else. What did Livingston say to you?"

Sadie maintained a stubborn silence for a full minute.

"Go ahead and tell me. What did he say?"

"I — I cannot."

"Nonsense. You must. What was it that you

think he was right about? It's almost impossible for him to be right on anything."

"I — just can't say it, No. 44. Don't make me."

"I've got to know," he said relentlessly.

"Please!"

"It was about me — and you? Wasn't it?"

"N-no. Not exactly. Not all of it."

Sadie was in a pitiable state of embarrassment. How could she tell him what Livingston said? How could she confess she loved him when her own ears were waiting for the message that was unfinished on his lips?

"Go ahead."

"It was about a man and a woman," she faltered.

"Something like a parable?"

She nodded.

"Let me see if I can guess some of it," said Stoddard. "He told you about a man who was rich and successful, who had an education and a social position and ambitious relatives, and all that sort of thing. Is that right?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"And then he told you about a woman who was poor and had a very lowly position in society and who did not always talk after the fashion of educated people. Didn't he?"

"Yes."

"I imagined it was something of that sort," he went on slowly. "Larry is clever, in his damnably contemptible way. He made the two pictures exceedingly vivid, beyond doubt."

"Not exactly," she corrected. "I — I told him about the woman."

"He left that to you, did he? He just suggested it, for you to fill in the details. Nice of Larry! Well, after you had these two pictures before you, what then?"

"He went away."

"And left you to study them?"

She inclined her head in faint assent.

"Nothing else said? You're sure?"

"He — he asked a question."

"What was it?"

"That's the part I can't say," she answered in a whisper.

Stoddard sat watching her, trying to obtain a glimpse of her face, which she kept steadily averted from him. Of a sudden the same magic thrill as that which had swept over him that instant when she was almost in his arms, back on their island, surged in his blood again.

He reached for her hands and seized them.

"Sadie!"

He spoke rapidly now with joyous confidence.

"I love you. I want you. I *need* you! I'm going to have you. Do you understand? I've found you and I'm going to keep you. That's why I followed you here. You know it. I would have followed you anywhere, and forever, until I found you.

"I love you. Do you hear? I love you!"

Her hands stirred in his grasp; she shrank from him.

"Don't!" she exclaimed.

"I will! You belong to me. You love me."

She drew away from his grip with a sudden motion and struggled to her feet. Stoddard leaped up, but she held him from her with a gesture.

"Don't! I can't bear it!"

"I tell you --"

"Stop!"

There was a ring of command in her voice.

"You mustn't say it. I mustn't listen. I thought it all out — after he asked me the question."

She hesitated; then went on desperately:

"Yes; it's the question he asked. I knew the answer. There couldn't only be but one. He wanted to know — what the woman would do if she really loved the man! That was it! And what would she do? You know — I know. There ain't any other way!"

Stoddard's eyes glowed as he watched her. She was facing him bravely now, not flinching from his gaze.

"He said that love meant a sacrifice," she went on rapidly. "He's right. He knew. It does mean that. A woman can't drag down a man she loves. If she isn't meant for him, she's got to give him up.

"There! I've said it because you made me. I've said I love you. It's true! And it'll always be true! I can't never stop that. But that's all it'll ever be, because — because I love you too much to hurt you!"

With a cry of triumph he brushed aside the arms

that tried to ward him off and drew her against his breast in a mighty embrace.

"God bless you!" he murmured. "I knew you loved me."

She struggled in his arms sobbing, but he held her fast.

"Don't!" she gasped. "You mustn't! I got to give you up. I ain't fit for you. We're different. Think — your mother, your sister! Ah, let me go!"

He was smiling down at the bronze hair that lay against his ragged flannel shirt. Gently he bent his lips to it. Then he began talking to her as if she were a child to be comforted.

"Cry, if you want to, dear. It doesn't make any difference. I've got you now. I'm not going to give you up and you couldn't give me up if you wanted to.

"You haven't looked deeply enough into your heart, Sadie. Do you think that I haven't thought of all the things you thought? Ah, but I have, dear! I went over it all. And I found it all false and shallow and unworthy of a sacrifice. And there cannot be any — and will not.

"We love each other. That is the beginning and the end of it."

She sobbed quietly in his arms without an effort to release herself.

"So you must put it all out of your dear, foolish head," he went on softly. "Do you think I care if you do not always talk as other women do? I love you.

"Does it matter to me that you worked in a factory? I love you.

"Does it make any difference because somebody sent me to school and forgot to send you? I love you.

"Nothing can stand against that. Nothing will. Look at me, Sadie!"

She stirred a little. He heard her whisper:

"You're — sure?"

"You know it!"

Suddenly she lifted her head and met his glance steadily. He saw a wonderful light in her gray eyes. They were timorous no longer, though her lips trembled and the tears were still on her cheeks. Then her arms were flung around his neck fiercely.

"I won't give you up!" she panted. "I can't! Maybe it's wrong; I don't care! You said I belonged to you — and I do! And you belong to me! I — I tried to give you up, and something won't let me. So now it's forever! Ah, Jack — Jack! Hold me close!"

For a little they stood thus, Sadie clinging to him in silence, while the little brook ran tinkling onward at their feet. The brook was very old and love was very old, so there was nothing to pause and wonder at.

An hour later they were laughing with the brook. Stoddard was finishing a narration of his detention by the immigration officials and of their tribute to the *bona fide* evidence of Sadie's citizenship.

"I did talk very plain," she confessed. "Slangin' helps once in a while, even if it ain't proper."

When he reached the tale of the Shrimp and the spanking Sadie became almost hysterical. She hugged her big man in delight and begged him to tell it all over again.

"I could 've done it myself," she said a little proudly, "only it wouldn't 've looked dignified."

"Alys thought it was great," he added.

"Alys?"

"No. 17."

Sadie bestowed upon him a look of swift scrutiny.

"Where'd you get that Alys stuff?" she demanded.

"Oh, we got to be good friends," said Stoddard with affected carelessness, although his eyes were twinkling.

"Oh, you did!" exclaimed Sadie disdainfully. "You mean that blonde with the frizzes?"

"Yes; nice-looking girl. She offered to teach me to dance."

"Oh, I bet she did! And you thought she was good-lookin', did you?"

Sadie had bridled at the mention of the name and she was now trying to look offended.

"Just good-looking, I said," explained Stoddard. "Not beautiful."

His eyes were watching her as he spoke. Sadie became mollified.

"Am I really beautiful?" she asked.

"Haven't you ever thought so yourself?"

"I knew I was good-lookin'," she admitted. "It ain't no harm for a girl to know that, I guess, providin' it's true. But I guess I wasn't ever stuck up

over it. But beautiful — Well, that sounds like a lot more."

"It is."

"I hope so, anyhow," she added seriously. "'Cause I got to be something, Jack, just on your account. I ain't got anything but my looks right now. But I'm goin' to have! And it's goin' to be an awful big job for you."

"What do you mean, Sadie?"

"I ain't goin' to be a wife that you'll be ashamed of. That's what I mean. You can hide me at first, but I won't always stay hid.

"You see, it's this way: Right now I ain't fit to be taken nowhere among your kind of people. I'd shame you. I'd shame myself, too. They'd laugh at me. I couldn't blame 'em, either. And if they laughed at you on my account it'd nearly kill me.

"That's why I ran away. I never understood exactly the difference between some women and others till I seen your mother. Then it came to me right off what I really was. And then when Mr. Livingston talked to me I seen more of it. I seen it on your account, too. So I just had to go away.

"I didn't dare wait for you to come back. I knew what you was goin' to say to me; you'd almost said it. And once you'd ever told me I wouldn't 've been able to go. I wasn't strong enough for that, Jack."

"But you tried to give me up only a little while ago," he reminded her.

"Did I? I'd almost forgotten. Seems now

like I couldn't 've meant it. Because if anybody told me I'd have to give you up now there'd — Well, there'd be fightin', I guess. But now we've got each other —"

She paused momentarily as if the phrase pleased her.

"Now we've got each other," she repeated, "I got to be raised up till I stand level with you. I got to get educated."

"I love you as you are," he declared vehemently.

"I know," she nodded. "That makes me think there's something to me. But I don't love myself as much as I used to; not since I met you — and wanted you. Always, years back, I'd been promisin' myself that some day I'd learn things, but the time never come round. It's come now.

"That's why you've got an awful big job, Jack. You got to help me. You got to teach me. I can't stay ignorant any more. You will, won't you, boy?"

"I'll do anything in God's world for you," he said solemnly.

Sadie lifted her head proudly. There was the light of a great resolve in her calm, gray eyes.

"I'm goin' to be a credit to you some day, Jack," she said quietly. "Maybe it'll be years, but it'll come. I know it."

Darkness had come when Stoddard and Sadie climbed aboard a city-bound car at the trolley terminal. They talked but little on the journey back. His own mind was filled with reverent wonder at

the strong, clean-souled woman who had come so strangely into his life, while in Sadie's there were deep peace and content — and a rainbow.

He had twenty-six cents in capital when they entered the telegraph-office to inquire if a reply to his message had been received, while Sadie was in but little better financial state. Stoddard breathed a sigh of satisfaction as the clerk counted a pile of bills and shoved them across the desk.

"We'll be civilized in an hour if there are any stores open," he said.

"I kind of like you the way you are," she said.

They were leaving when the clerk called Stoddard back.

"There's a message, too," he said, tossing an envelope upon the counter.

Stoddard read it and frowned.

"Bad news?" asked Sadie.

He handed her the telegram. She read:

Money wired as per your telegram. Have just signed railroad-construction contract for Argentine. Can you be ready to take steamer sailing in three days?

"Where's Argentine, Jack?"

"South America."

"And how long'll the job take?"

"I don't know. A year at least."

He stood with a blank look on his face, rereading the message.

"Well, why don't you answer it?" asked Sadie.

"But what am I going to say?"

"Say 'Yes.'"

"But for a year! I can't wait for you that long, Sadie!"

"You won't have to. I'm goin' with you."

"But —"

"It's the chance I need. A year's studyin'— where nobody can laugh at me."

"You mean you'll —"

"Marry you any time, Jack."

She put her hands on his shoulders and smiled up at him, but her eyes were grave.

"I ain't a doll-baby, dear," she said. "I'm a woman. Wherever you go I'm goin'. That's my idea of a wife."

CHAPTER XXI

REUNION

ANOTHER September had come in the Deepwater. It was glowing and golden wherever the lake stretched. But there was one green island upon which the sunlight seemed to rest like a benediction. It was an island quiet and sturdy, knowing its own strength and happiness and being content.

In a little brown glade among the trees stood a tent, the flap thrown wide. There was an orderly stone fireplace near by, from which wisps of blue-gray smoke ascended. A bench and a table had been built between convenient trees. There was a pile of cut wood at one side of the clearing.

A green-bottomed canoe lay on the shore a few yards distant. On everything the sun was shining, while a soft breeze came in from the lake, bearing freshness and the sweet scents of early fall.

A woman stepped out of the tent and stood for a moment watching the water. She was tall and straight and fair, even through the smooth, brown tan that lay upon her cheeks. Her deep bosom rose and fell softly under an olive-drab shirt. There was a red scarf at her throat. A broad-brimmed sombrero of felt shaded her eyes. From beneath it strayed strands of flaming bronze. Her

tan skirt fell a little below her knees, where it was met by high-laced boots. A leather belt girdled her waist.

In her simple costume she gave the impression of a woman richly dressed, a woman who fitted her environment, knew it, and was satisfied.

She stepped across the little camp, looked in each direction along the shore; then cupped her hands at her lips and called:

"O-o-oh, Jack!"

An answering hail came faintly from somewhere beyond a jutting point. She began following the shore in the direction of the sound. Presently she met a man. Save in one particular, he, too, was stoutly dressed for the woods. His shirt was old and worn and patched, and there were the marks of careful stitching where a rent had been closed in the shoulder.

"How do I look?" she asked.

"Magnificent."

"I put on my very best. How is it from the back?"

She turned slowly while he surveyed the costume.

"Couldn't be better! You're absolutely stunning!"

She smiled and nodded despairingly.

"You always say that," she said, "no matter how I look."

"But it's true, Sadie."

"I hope so. But I'm always afraid of your praising me, even when I don't deserve it. When will she be here?"

"Soon, I think."

"Don't you want to change that shirt of yours?" She was eying the patches critically.

"Never! It's my lucky shirt. See what it brought me!"

"It won't stand much more mending," she said, smiling reminiscently. "But I can't make you give it up, it seems."

She spoke slowly and with an odd precision in her voice, as if each word and sentence that came to her lips passed rigid censorship before utterance was given it.

The big man slipped his arm about his wife. They strolled slowly in the direction of the camp.

"I'm a little frightened," she said, with a nervous laugh.

"I'm not," he declared promptly. "It's going to be an instant and complete victory."

"I always think she'll never forgive me, Jack — for taking you. What do you suppose she thinks I'm like? She's never had even a picture."

"I told her what you were like every time I wrote. She knows that you are very wonderful."

Sadie patted his shoulder indulgently.

"You don't understand women yet," she said. "It doesn't count — what a man says about the woman he loves. Your mother won't decide until she sees."

"But I know her decision." He nodded confidently.

"I mustn't forget to talk slowly," she went on.

"I'm not very bad when I stop and think carefully. Am I, Jack?"

"I simply marvel at you, dear. Oh, but that's true! I didn't believe any person could do it in a year."

"That's because we went away where I could have my schoolmaster all to myself. I liked it down in Argentine, Jack. I could get away from everything and study."

"We may have to go again."

"When?" She spoke quickly and anxiously.

"Not for a year, at least. Perhaps not then. But there's a likelihood."

"A year? Oh, that's all right."

She smiled enigmatically and tightened her arm about his shoulders.

Their year in a far land had been a wondrous one for Sadie Stoddard. She had seen her big husband doing serious things, fighting and conquering and patiently hewing the obstacles from his path.

She was extravagantly proud of him. It seemed to her that nothing he set his will upon could stand before him. Even when he spent long hours over strange columns and combinations of figures that she did not understand she still knew he was fighting, planning, counting the victory.

Then Sadie had found herself doing things. Stoddard's spirit of conquest reigned in her own soul. She was fighting, too — fighting against the bondage that held her mind and speech in check. And she gloried in it, because she knew that she, like her wonderful husband, was gaining a victory.

She had become a slave to her books. She drove herself relentlessly. Sometimes he tried to check her impetuosity, but she would endure no restraint. She wanted to learn — learn — learn! She had a new vision before her. It pictured a time when she would be standing by his side, helping to fight his battles.

It was a far day, she knew, but that made her the more resolute to achieve it. She did not tell him this, but it was always in her heart and mind, spurring her.

"I'll be helping him some day," she would whisper to herself. "I'll be even more than his wife; I'll be his right-hand man."

They had gone to the far land two days after their marriage. His mother knew only after they were on the sea that she had a daughter-in-law. For several months afterward all else that she knew had come from Larry Livingston. At first she did not believe. Then, when she realized that Livingston spoke the truth, her heart was filled with bitterness, resentment and even horror. She felt that she could never see her son again; that he had passed out of her life in disgrace and shame.

Then his letters had begun to come — brave, joyous letters from a wilderness. Slowly it dawned upon her that her son was happy. That comforted her. More and more he wrote to her about his wonderful wife. She could not and would not believe, yet she was glad that her son believed. He was back in her heart again, for the mother in her would not be denied.

But as for the woman she was a thing apart. There could be no change there. The mother-love was not broad enough to cover both; the mother-jealousy still burned, a persistent flame.

Mrs. Stoddard was abroad when her son and his wife returned from South America. They had not lingered in New York, but made swiftly for the Deepwater, where they always lived in their dreams. Now they were lodged again on the island where Fate had cast them a year before and where Love had built its camp-fire.

Stoddard's mother returned to the United States to learn that her son and his wife were once more in their forest Arcadia. Her heart ached for a sight of her big boy.

Yet she hesitated. The other woman was there, standing between them. It was a letter, penned from the heart of the great outdoors, that decided her. The letter was from her son's wife.

This time Stoddard had word of his mother's coming. Sadie was apprehensive, yet eager. She knew it would be hard to forgive, for she herself had the heart of a woman.

"But perhaps she'll see — and understand," she told herself. "Maybe she'll love me just because I love him, or because he loves me. Oh, if I can only make her know what I'm trying to be — what I *will* be!"

The launch would be coming from the hotel soon. Sadie had quietly prepared herself for the ordeal. In her heart was a prayer that her husband would

be proud of her, even when she stood side by side with the grand lady she had once furtively looked upon from a hiding place in the woods.

"I think I'll read another chapter while we're waiting," she said, turning to her husband. "Where did you put my history, Jack?"

"I think it's in the tent. Can't you rest a little, dear?"

"No," she answered, shaking her head gently. "I mustn't rest. I don't want to rest. I want to keep going — on and on. And I'm never tired. That's why I love it."

He fetched the book. Sadie found her chapter. She settled herself comfortably against a tree and read a page. Then a quizzical look came into her eyes, and she glanced slyly at Stoddard.

"Jack!" she said.

"Yes?"

"Why couldn't the colonists have went somewhere else beside England to buy their tea?"

"They were given no choice," he answered. "England enforced a monopoly."

Sadie closed her book and looked at him severely.

"That's the second time I've caught you to-day," she chided, shaking her finger at him. "I didn't tell you the first. I wanted to see if you'd do it again. And you did!"

"What?"

"Broke the rule."

"Did I?" he inquired innocently.

"You know very well you did. That was only a

trick question I asked you. Didn't you hear me say, 'Have went'? You know you did, Jack. But you never corrected me."

"I don't think I noticed," he pleaded.

"But you must notice!" she declared. "It's the agreement. You mustn't ever let me say things like that. Every time I do you're to tell me. That's twice you've let me off to-day. How am I ever going to get on if you don't keep watching me?"

"But you're getting on so wonderfully!" he protested. "It seems like nagging to tell you of every little slip."

"It's not nagging," said Sadie stoutly. "It's part of the game. And you agreed to play it, so I'm not going to let you off. Why, if it hadn't been for that I'd never have learned to put on my g's. Even now I forget, sometimes."

"But you're so terribly strict with yourself," Stoddard sighed. "I don't care if you do drop a 'g' once in a while."

"But *I* care! I have to be strict with myself. Who would be, if I weren't? Not you, you dear old easy-goer. I could speak factory English the rest of my days, and you'd be satisfied."

He nodded.

"But *I* wouldn't!" she affirmed vehemently. "And that's why you simply must keep at me — always. I mean as long as there's need of it. And the harder you keep at me the shorter the time will be, Jack."

Stoddard surveyed his wife with fond eyes.

"Let's not read history now," he said, taking the

book from her. "School's out for the day. Let's talk."

They were soon again on the subject of his mother's visit and Sadie's fears.

"You mustn't think that mother is severe," he was saying. "She's not really that way. But, you see, she has been used to one sort of life and it's not easy for her to accept anything else."

"She's strict about what is proper and what isn't, I suppose," mused Sadie. "That's one thing that worries me — what she thinks about the way we met."

"I never told her that, dear. There was no use. She doesn't know about the letter and the shirt."

"Yes, she does," said Sadie quietly. "I told her in the letter I wrote."

Stoddard looked at his wife in surprise.

"It was best," she went on, nodding. "You're her son, and she had a right to know all about me. So I told her.

"You'd been sending her those beautiful letters about me, but they weren't about the real me at all. I couldn't be all the things you said I was; not yet, at any rate.

"When I wrote there wasn't any praise in it — except about you. She mustn't ever tell you what I wrote about you; there'll be no living with you if she does.

"I told her who I was and what I was and how I met you. I didn't leave out any of that part. And I told her what I was trying to do. I had it all spelled right, I'm sure, because I went over all the

hard words with the dictionary. That's why I'm wondering what she's going to think of me."

He sat silently for a moment; then reached for his wife's hand.

"You did right," he said. "I think God gave you the cleanest courage ever put into the soul of a woman."

A little later, as they sat talking in low voices, the sound of a motor-launch rounding into Pickerel Bay from the South Arm reached their island. Sadie fell into a constrained silence as the craft drew nearer. When Stoddard walked down to the rocks to meet it she arose, went over to the tent and aimlessly busied herself there.

Mrs. Stoddard was lifted ashore in the arms of her son and stood clinging to him in a long embrace.

"Just the same boy," she said softly, as she searched his face with anxious eyes. "My boy, John!"

He smiled down at her and patted her shoulder. Then she drew away from him and glanced about her.

"Where is my daughter?" she asked.

The quietly spoken words thrilled Stoddard. What a mother she was! He turned and leaped up the embankment, running across the clearing to where Sadie stood.

"Come!" he said, taking her by the hand. "She has asked for her daughter."

Sadie, a light of wonderment in her eyes, followed him.

The two women faced each other for an instant

in silence. The glance of the elder was swift and keen, yet there was a smiling tenderness in her eyes. Then she put forth her arms.

"Come, daughter," she said.

Stoddard turned his back and went off a little distance, trying to swallow a lump in his throat. When he turned again he saw two women in each other's arms, the golden-bronze head of Sadie hidden against his mother's shoulder, while her figure trembled with joyous sobs.

He went far down the island, his heart filled with a great happiness. It was more than an hour before he returned, to find them sitting together by the tent, one of Sadie's hands clasped between his mother's. Mrs. Stoddard looked up at him and smiled.

"When can I coax you two away from your woods?" she said. "My heart is hungry and selfish. I want my son and daughter under my own roof."

It was just before the launch carried Mrs. Stoddard back to the hotel on Deepwater Island that she whispered to him:

"I came to make a sacrifice, but there is none to be made. She is more than you said. I love her. Bring her to me soon."

They watched the launch until it passed from sight beyond a headland. Then Stoddard's glance swept slowly over the warm tints of the September landscape, and he sighed.

"I suppose we will have to go pretty soon," he

said. "She wants you. Yet I don't see how I'm going to share you."

"We can come back again, boy."

"Why, we'll come back in the spring!" he exclaimed. "I never thought of it before! We'll stay a whole season."

"No; not in the spring," mused Sadie, shaking her head gently.

"But why not? It's glorious here then."

"I'll tell you why, Jack."

She went close to him, put her arms about his neck and drew his head down until her lips were at his ear.

"Sadie!"

"Yes," she said as she clung to him. "That's why I was worried when you spoke first about going back to Argentine. And that's why we can't come to Canada in the spring.

"He's — he's going to be born under the flag. He's going to have his chance to be President.

"And, oh, I'll be so busy all winter, Jack! Besides sewing on all the little foolish things, I must study — study hard — all through the winter, and long after that."

She looked up at her husband with shining eyes. "You see, dear," she whispered, "he mustn't ever hear his mother say, 'Have went'!"

THE END

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